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*Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum*

Balzac

From a study in clay by Auguste Rodin

# WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF BALZAC

JUANITA HELM FLOYD

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1921

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TO
MY SISTER NANNIE

" . . . for no one knows the secret of my life, and I do not wish to disclose it to any one."

*Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 418, July 19, 1837.

*Port-Blanc par Penvénan*
*(Côtes-du-Nord)*
*ce 27 octobre, 1920*

*Chère Miss Floyd,*

*Je trouve votre lettre du 16 septembre, en rentrant ici d'une absence de quelques jours et, en m'excusant d'y répondre si tard, je m'empresse de vous adresser l'attestation que vous me demandez au sujet de votre thèse: "Les femmes dans la Vie de Balzac." J'ai encore présent à l'esprit tout votre travail, que j'eus si grand plaisir et profit à lire en manuscrit, et compterai toujours comme un des meilleurs souvenirs de mon passage à Columbia l'honneur d'avoir été appelé à présider votre soutenance. Je ne me suis pas privé de vous exprimer alors ma satisfaction ni de porter sur votre oeuvre l'appréciation la plus élogieuse. Je suis heureux de vous la renouveler ici, dans les mêmes termes: vous avez écrit une thèse, à la fois consciencieuse et attachante, qui, si elle n'épuise pas le sujet, y apporte une précieuse contribution dont l'histoire des lettres françaises vous demeurera redevable.*

*C'est en français, à cause de cela même, que je tiens à vous délivrer cette attestation dont je vous autorise à faire tel usage que vous jugerez à propos. Vous me dites que vous avez encore condensé votre matière, avant de la livrer à l'impression: je serai particulièrement flatté de relire votre travail sous sa forme définitive pour laquelle les conseils du Professeur Todd ont dû vous etre si utiles, et j'accepte donc de grand coeur l'offre aimable que vous me faites de m'en adresser un exemplaire.*

*Avec mes remercîments à l'avance et tous mes compliments encore, chère Miss Floyd, je vous prie de trouver ici l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus respectueux et les plus sympathiques.*

*Anatole Le Braz.*

# PREFACE

In presenting this study of Balzac's intimate relations with various women, the author regrets her inability, owing to war conditions, to consult a few books which are out of print and certain documents which have not appeared at all in print, notably the collection of the late Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul.

The author gladly takes this opportunity of acknowledging her deep gratitude to various scholars, and wishes to express, even if inadequately, her appreciation of their inspiring contact; especially to Professor Chester Murray and Professor J. Warshaw for first interesting her in the great possibilities of a study of Balzac. To Professor Henry Alfred Todd she is grateful for his sympathetic scholarship, valuable suggestions as to matter and style, and for his careful revision of the manuscript; to Professor Gustave Lanson, for his erudition and versatile mind, which have had a great influence; to Professor F. M. Warren, for reading a part of the text and for many general ideas; to Professor Fernand Baldensperger, for reading the text and for encouragement; to Professor Gilbert Chinard, Professor Earle B. Babcock and Professor LeBraz for re-reading the text and for valuable suggestions; and to Professor John L. Gerig for his sympathetic interest, broad information, and inspiring encouragement.

To still another would she express her thanks. The Princess Radziwill has taken a great interest in this work, which deals so minutely with the life history of her aunt, and she has been most gracious in giving the author much information not to be found in books. She has made many valuable suggestions, read the entire manuscript, and approved of its presentation of the facts involved.

JUANITA H. FLOYD.

Evansville, Indiana.

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# INTRODUCTION

A quantity of books have been written about Balzac, some of which are very instructive, while others are nothing but compilations of gossip which give a totally wrong impression of the life, works and personality of the great French novelist. Having the honor of being the niece of his wife, the wonderful *Étrangère,* whom he married after seventeen years of an affection which contained episodes far more romantic than any of those which he has described in his many books, and having been brought up in the little house of the rue Fortunée, afterwards the rue Balzac, where they lived during their short married life, I can perhaps better appreciate than most people the value of these different books, none of which gives us an exact appreciation of the man or of the difficulties through which he had to struggle before he won at last the fame which he deserved. And the conclusion to which I came, after having read them most attentively and conscientiously, was that it is often a great misfortune to possess that divine spark of genius which now and then touches the brow of a few human creatures and marks them for eternity with its fiery seal. Had Balzac been one of those everyday writers whose names, after having been for a brief space of time on everyone's lips, are later on almost immediately forgotten, he would not have been subjected to the calumnies which embit-

tered so much his declining days, and which even after he was no longer in this world continued their subterranean and disgusting work, trying to sully not only Balzac's own colossal personality, but also that of the devoted wife, whom he had cherished for such a long number of years, who had all through their course shared his joys and his sorrows, and who, after he died, had spent the rest of her own life absorbed in the remembrance of her love for him, a love which was stronger than death itself.

Having spent all my childhood and youth under the protection and the roof of Madame de Balzac, it was quite natural that every time I saw another inaccuracy or falsehood concerning her or her great husband find its way into the press, I should be deeply affected. At last I began to look with suspicion at all the books dealing with Balzac or with his works, and when Miss Floyd asked me to look over her manuscript, it was with a certain amount of distrust and prejudice that I set myself to the task. It seemed to me impossible that a foreigner could write anything worth reading about Balzac, or understand his psychology. What was therefore my surprise when I discovered in this most remarkable volume the best description that has ever been given to us of this particular phase of Balzac's life which hitherto has hardly been touched upon by his numerous biographers, his friendships with the many distinguished women who at one time or another played a part in his busy existence, a description which not only confirmed down to the smallest details all that my aunt had related to me about her distinguished husband, but which also gave an

appreciation of the latter's character that entirely agreed with what I had heard about its peculiarities from the few people who had known him well, Théophile Gautier among others, who were still alive when I became old enough to be intensely interested in their different judgments about my uncle. After such a length of years it seemed almost uncanny to find a person who through sheer intuition and hard study could have reconstituted with this unerring accuracy the figure of one who had remained a riddle in certain things even to his best friends, and who in the pages of this extraordinary book suddenly appeared before my astonished eyes with all the splendor of that genius of his which as years go by, becomes more and more admired and appreciated.

One must be a scholar to understand Balzac; his style and manner of writing is often so heavy and so difficult to follow, reminding one more of that of a professor than of a novelist. And indeed he would have been very angry to be considered only as a novelist, he who aspired and believed himself to be, as he expressed it one day in the course of a conversation with Madame Hanska, before she became his wife, " a great painter of humanity," in which appreciation of his work he was not mistaken, because some of the characters he evoked out of his wonderful brain remind one of those pictures of Rembrandt where every stroke of the master's brush reveals and brings into evidence some particular trait or feature, which until he had discovered it, and brought it to notice, no one had seen or remarked on the human faces which he reproduced upon the canvas. Michelet, who once called St. Simon the " Rembrandt of literature," could

very well have applied the same remark to Balzac, whose heroes will live as long as men and women exist, for whom these other men and women whom he described, will relive because he did not conjure their different characters out of his imagination only, but condensed all his observations into the creation of types which are so entirely human and real that we shall continually meet with them so long as the world lasts.

One of Balzac's peculiarities consisted in perpetually studying humanity, which study explains the almost unerring accuracy of his judgments and of the descriptions which he gives us of things and facts as well as of human beings. In his impulsiveness, he frequented all kinds of places, saw all kinds of people, and tried to apply the dissecting knife of his spirit of observation to every heart and every conscience. He set himself especially to discover and fathom the mystery of the "eternal feminine" about which he always thought, and it was partly due to this eager quest for knowledge of women's souls that he allowed himself to become entangled in love affairs and love intrigues which sometimes came to a sad end, and that he spent his time in perpetual search of feminine friendships, which were later on to brighten, or to mar his life.

Miss Floyd in the curious volume which she has written has caught in a surprising manner this particular feature in Balzac's complex character. She has applied herself to study not only the man such as he was, with all his qualities, genius and undoubted mistakes, but such as he appeared to be in the eyes of the different women whom he had loved or admired, and at whose hands he

had sought encouragement and sympathy amid the cruel disappointments and difficulties of an existence from which black care was never banished and never absent. With quite wonderful tact, and a lightness of touch one can not sufficiently admire, she has made the necessary distinctions which separated friendship from love in the many romantic attachments which played such an important part in Balzac's life, and she has in consequence presented to us simultaneously the writer, whose name will remain an immortal one, and the man whose memory was treasured, long after he had himself disappeared, by so many who, though they had perhaps never understood him entirely, yet had realized that in the marks of affection and attachment which he had given to them, he had laid at their feet something which was infinitely precious, infinitely real, something which could never be forgotten.

Her book will remain a most valuable, I was going to say the most valuable, contribution to the history of Balzac, and those for whom he was something more than a great writer and scholar, can never feel sufficiently grateful to her for having given it to the world, and helped to dissipate, thanks to its wonderful arguments, so many false legends and wild stories which were believed until now, and indeed are still believed by an ignorant crowd of so-called admirers of his, who, nine times out of ten, are only detractors of his colossal genius, and remarkable, though perhaps sometimes too exuberant, individuality.

At the same time, Miss Floyd, in the lines which she devotes to my aunt and to the long attachment that had united the latter and Balzac, has in many points re-es-

tablished the truth in regard to the character of a woman who in many instances has been cruelly calumniated and slandered, in others absolutely misunderstood, to whom Balzac once wrote that she was "one of those great minds, which solitude had preserved from the petty meannesses of the world," words which describe her better than volumes could have done. She had truly led a silent, solitary, lonely life that had known but one love, the man whom she was to marry after so many vicissitudes, and in spite of so many impediments, and but one tenderness, her daughter, a daughter who unfortunately was entirely her inferior, and in whom she could never find consolation or comfort, who could neither share her joys, nor soothe her sorrows.

In her convictions, Madame de Balzac was a curious mixture of atheism and profound faith in a Divinity before whom mankind was accountable for all its good or bad deeds. All through her long life she had been under the influence of her father, one of the remarkable men of his generation, who had enjoyed the friendship of most of the great French writers of the period immediately preceding the Revolution, including Voltaire; he had brought her up in the atmosphere of the eighteenth century with its touch of skepticism, and the Encyclopedia had always remained for her a kind of gospel, in spite of the fact that she had been reared in one of the most haughty, aristocratic circles in Europe, in a country where the very mention of the words *liberty* and *freedom of opinion* was tabooed, and that her mother had been one of those devout Roman Catholics who think it necessary to consult their confessor, even in

regard to the most trivial details of their daily existence. Placed as she had been between her parents' incredulity and bigotry, my aunt had formed opinions of her own, of which a profound tolerance and a deep respect for the beliefs and convictions of others was the principal feature. She never condemned even when she did not approve, and she hated hypocrisy, no matter in what shape or aspect it presented itself before her eyes. This explains the courage she displayed when against the advice and the wishes of her family, she persisted in marrying Balzac, though it hardly helps us to understand from what we know of the latter's character, how he came to fall so deeply in love with a woman who in almost everything thought so differently from what he thought, especially in regard to those two subjects which absorbed and engrossed him until the last days of his life, religion and politics.

That he loved her, and that she loved him, in spite of these differences in their points of view, is to their mutual honor, but it adds to the mystery and to the enigmatical side of a romance that has hardly been equalled in modern times; and it accounts for the fact that some friction occurred between them later on, when my aunt found herself trying to restrain certain exuberances on the part of her husband regarding her own high lineage, about which she never thought much herself, though she had always tried to live up to the duties which it imposed upon her. I am mentioning this circumstance to explain certain exaggerations which we constantly find in Balzac's letters in regard to his marriage. His imagination was extremely vivid, and its fertility sometimes carried him far

away into regions where it was nearly impossible to follow him, and where he really came to believe quite sincerely in things which had never existed. For instance in his correspondence with his mother and friends, he is always speaking of the necessity for Madame Hanska to obtain the permission of the Czar to marry him. This is absolutely untrue. My aunt did not require in the very least the consent of the Emperor to become Madame de Balzac. The difficulties connected with her marriage consisted in the fact that having been left sole heiress of her first husband's immense wealth, she did not think herself justified in keeping it after she had contracted another union, and with a foreigner. She therefore transferred her whole fortune to her daughter, reserving for herself only an annuity which was by no means considerable, and it was this arrangement that had to be sanctioned, not by the sovereign who had nothing to do with it, but by the Supreme Court of Russia, which at that time was located in St. Petersburg. Balzac, however, wishing to impress his French relatives with the grandeur of the marriage he was about to make, imagined this tale of the Czar's opposition, in order to add to his own importance and to that of his future wife, an invention which revolted my aunt so much that in that part of her husband's correspondence which was published by her a year or two before her death, she carefully suppressed all the passages which contained this assertion which had so thoroughly annoyed as well as angered her. I have sometimes wondered what she would have said had she seen appear in print the curious letter which Balzac wrote immediately after their wedding to Dr. Nacquart in

which he described with such pomp the different high qualities, merits, and last but not least, brilliant positions occupied by his wife's relatives, beginning with Queen Marie Leszczinska, the consort of Louis XV, and ending with the husband of my father's stepdaughter, Count Orloff, whom the widest stretch of imagination could not have connected with my aunt.

I cannot refrain from mentioning here an anecdote which is very typical of Balzac. He was about to return to Paris from Russia after his marriage. My aunt coming into his room one morning found him absorbed in writing a letter. Asking him for whom it was intended she was petrified with astonishment when he replied that it was for the Duke de Bordeaux, as the Comte de Chambord was still called at the time, to present his respects to him upon his entrance into his family! My aunt at first could not understand what it was he meant, and when at last she had grasped the fact that it was in virtue of her distant, very distant, relationship with Queen Marie Leszczinska that he claimed the privilege of cousinship with the then Head of the Royal House of France, it was with the greatest difficulty and with any amount of trouble that she prevailed upon him at last to give up this remarkable idea, and to be content with the knowledge that some Rzewuski blood flowed in the veins of the last remaining member of the elder line of the Bourbons, without intruding upon the privacy of the Comte de Chambord, who probably would have been somewhat surprised to receive this extraordinary communication from the great, but also snobbish Balzac.

It was on account of this snobbishness, which had some-

thing childish about it, that he sometimes became involved in discussions, not only with my aunt but also with several of his friends, Victor Hugo among others, who could not bring themselves to forgive him for thinking more of the great and illustrious families with which his marriage had connected him than of his own genius and marvelous talents. Hugo most unjustly accused my aunt of encouraging this "aberration," as he called it, of Balzac's mind; in which judgment of her he was vastly mistaken, because she was the person who suffered the most through it, and by it. But this unwarranted suspicion made him antagonistic to her, and probably inspired the famous description he left us of Balzac's last hours in the little volume called *Choses vues*. This was partly the cause why people afterwards said that my aunt's married life with the great writer had been far from happy, and had resolved itself into a great disappointment for both of them. The reality was very different, because during the few months they lived together, they had known and enjoyed complete and absolute happiness, and Madame de Balzac's heart was forever broken when she closed with pious hands the eyes of the man who had occupied such an immense place in her heart as well as in her life. Many years later, talking with me about those last sad hours when she watched with such tender devotion by his bedside, she told me with accents that are still ringing in my ears with their wail of agony: *J'ai vécu un enfer de souffrance ce jour là:* (I lived through a hell of suffering on that day.)

Nevertheless she bore up bravely under the load of the unmerited misfortunes which had fallen upon her. Her

first care, after she had become for the second time a widow, was to pay Balzac's debts, which she proceeded to do with that thoroughness she always brought to bear in everything she undertook. She remained upon the most affectionate terms with his family, and it was due to her that Balzac's mother was able to spend her last years in comfort. These facts speak for themselves, and, to my mind at least, dispose better than volumes on the subject could do of the conscious or unconscious calumny cast by Victor Hugo on my aunt's memory. It must here be explained that the real reason why he did not see her, when he called for the last time on his dying friend, and concluded so hastily that she preferred remaining in her own apartments than at her husband's side, consisted in the fact that she did not like the poet, who she instinctively felt, also did not care for her, so she preferred not to encounter a man whom she knew was antagonistic to herself at an hour when she was about to undergo the greatest trial of her life, and she retired to her room when he was announced. But Hugo, who had often reproached Balzac for being vain, had in his own character a dose of vanity sufficient to make him refuse to admit that there could exist in the whole of the wide world a human being who would not have jumped at the chance of seeing him, even under the most distressing of circumstances.

I have said already that my aunt's opinions consisted of a curious mixture of atheism and a profound belief in the Divinity. Her mind was far too vigorous and too deep to accept without discussion the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church to which she belonged officially, and she formed her own ideas as to religion and the part it

ought to play in human existence. She held the firm conviction that we must always try, at least, to do what is right, regardless of the sorrow this might entail upon us. In one of her letters to my mother, she says:

"You will know one day, my dear little sister, that what one cares the most to read over again in the book of life are those difficult pages of the past when, after a hard struggle, duty has remained the master of the battle field. It has buried its dead, and brushed aside all the reminders that were left of them, and God in his infinite mercy allows flowers and grasses to grow again on this bloody ground. Don't think that by these flowers, I mean to say that one forgets. No, on the contrary, I am thinking of remembrance, the remembrance of the victory that has been won after so many sacrifices; I am thinking of all those voices of the conscience which come to soothe us, and to tell us that our Father in Heaven is satisfied with what we have done."

A person who had intimately known both Balzac and my aunt said one day that they completed each other by the wide difference which existed in their opinions in regard to the two important subjects of religion and politics. The remark was profoundly true, because it was this very difference which allowed them to bring into their judgments an impartiality which we seldom meet with in our modern society. They mutually respected and admired each other, and even when they were not in perfect accord, or just because they were not in perfect accord as to this or that thing, they nevertheless tried, thanks to the respect which they entertained for each other, to look upon mankind, its actions, follies and mistakes, with

kindness and indulgence. The curious thing in regard to their situation was that my aunt who had been born and reared in one of the most select and prejudiced of aristocratic circles, never knew what prejudice was, and remained until the last day of her life a staunch liberal, who could never bring herself to ostracize her neighbor, because he happened to think or to believe otherwise than she did herself. She was perfectly indifferent to advantages of birth, fortune or high rank, and she was rather inclined to criticize than to admire the particular society and world amidst which she moved. Balzac on the contrary, though a *bourgeois* by origin, cared only for those high spheres for which he had always longed since his early youth, and of which a sudden freak of fortune so unexpectedly had opened him the doors. In that sense he was the *parvenu* his enemies have accused him of being, and he often showed himself narrow minded, until at last his wife's influence made him consider, without the disdain he had affected for them before, people who were not of noble birth or of exalted rank. On the other hand, Madame de Balzac, thanks to her husband's Catholic and Legitimistic tendencies and sympathies, became less sarcastic than had been the case when she had, perhaps more than she ought, noticed the smallnesses and meannesses of the particular set of people who at that period constituted the cream of European society. They both came to acquire a wider view of the world in general, thanks to their different ways of looking at it, and this of course turned to their great mutual advantage.

I will not extend myself here on the help my aunt was

to Balzac all through the years which preceded their marriage, when there seemed no possibility of the marriage ever taking place. She encouraged him in his work, interested herself in all his actions, praised him for all his efforts, tried to be for him the guide and the star to which he could look in his moments of dark discouragement, as well as in his hours of triumph. Without her affection to console him, he would most probably have broken down under the load of immense difficulties which constantly burdened him, and he never would have been able to leave behind him as a legacy to a world that had never properly appreciated or understood him, those volumes of the *Comédie humaine* which have made his name immortal. Madame Hanska was his good genius all through those long and dreadful years during which he struggled with such indomitable courage against an adverse fate, and her devotion to him certainly deserved the words which he wrote to her one day, "I love you as I love God, as I love happiness!" *Je vous aime comme on aime Dieu, comme on aime le bonheur!*

All this has taken me very far from Miss Floyd's book, though what I have just written about my uncle and aunt completes in a certain sense the details she has given us concerning the wonderful romance which after seventeen years of arduous waiting, made of Madame Hanska the wife of one of the greatest literary glories of France. Her work is magnificent and she has handled it superbly, and reconstituted two remarkable figures who were beginning to be, not forgotten, which is impossible, but not so much talked about by the general public, who a few years ago, had shown itself so interested in their life his-

tory as it was first disclosed to us in the famous *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* published by the Vicomte Spoelberch de Lovenjoul. She has also cleared some of the clouds which had been darkening the horizon in regard to both Balzac and his wife, and restored to these two their proper places in the history of French literature in the nineteenth century. She has moreover shown us a hitherto unknown Balzac, and a still more unknown *Étrangère,* and this labor of love, because it was that all through, can only be viewed with feelings of the deepest gratitude by the few members still left alive of Madame de Balzac's family, my three brothers and myself. I feel very happy to be given this opportunity of thanking Miss Floyd, in my brothers' name as well as in my own, for the splendid work which she has done, and which I am quite certain will ensure for her a foremost place among the historians of Balzac.

CATHERINE, PRINCESS RADZIWILL.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

The steady rise of Balzac's reputation during the last few decades has been such that almost each year new studies have appeared about him. While the women portrayed in the *Comédie humaine* are often commented upon, no recent work dealing in detail with the novelist's intimate association with women and which might lead to identifying the possible sources of his feminine characters in real life has been published.

The present study does not undertake to establish the origin of all the characters found in the *Comédie humaine,* but is an attempt to trace the life of the novelist on the side of his relations with various women,— a story which is even more thrilling than those presented in many of his novels,— in the hope that it will help explain some of the interesting enigmas presented by his work. So far as the writer could find the necessary evidence, many of the women in Balzac's novels have been here identified with women he knew in the course of his life; and while giving due weight to the suggestions of various writers, and indicating some of the most striking resemblances, she has tried to avoid a mere promiscuous identification of characters.

In the case of many novelists such an investigation would not be worth while, but Balzac's place in literature is so transcendent and his life and writings are so closely and fascinatingly interblended, that it is hoped that the following study, in which the writer has striven to main-

tain correctness of detail, may not be unwelcome, and that it will throw light on Balzac's complex character, and help his readers better to understand and appreciate some of his most noted women characters. It is believed that this study will show that the influence of women on Balzac was much wider and his acquaintance with them much broader than has previously been supposed.

Apropos of remarks made by Sainte-Beuve and Brunetière regarding Balzac's admission to the higher circles of society, Émile Faguet has this to say:

> "I would point out that the duchesses and viscountesses at the end of the Restoration were known neither to Sainte-Beuve nor to Balzac, the former only having begun to frequent aristocratic drawing-rooms in 1840, and Balzac, in spite of his very short *liaison* with Madame de Castries, having become a regular attendant only a few months before that date. Sainte-Beuve himself has told us that the Faubourg Saint-Germain *was closed to men of letters before* 1830, and since it had to spend a few years becoming accustomed to their admittance, Sainte-Beuve's testimony is not at all valid as regards the great ladies of the Restoration, even at the end."[1]

Perhaps it is due partly to the above statement and partly to the fact that Balzac tried to give the impression that he led a sort of monastic life, that it is generally believed the novelist never had access to the aristocratic society of his time, and never had an opportunity of observing the great ladies or of frequenting the marvelous balls and receptions that fill so large a place in his writings.

[1] *Balzac*, p. 150.

Whether he made a success of such descriptions is not the question here, but the following pages will at least furnish proof that he not only had many social opportunities, but that his presence was sought by many women belonging to high life and the nobility.

In presenting in the following pages a somewhat imposing list of duchesses, countesses and women of varying degrees of nobility, it is not intended to picture Balzac as a *preux chevalier,* for he was far from being one. Even in the most refined of *salons,* he displayed his Rabelaisian manners and costume, and remained the typical author of the *Contes drôlatiques;* but to maintain that he never knew women of the upper class or never even entered their society, involves a misapprehension of the facts. Neither would the present writer give the impression that this was the only class of women he knew or associated with, for he certainly was acquainted with many of the *bourgeoisie* and of the peasant class; but here it is difficult to make out a case, since his letters to or about women of these classes are rare, and literary men of his day have not given many details of his association with them.

From Balzac's youth, his most intense longings were to be famous and to be loved. At times it might almost be thought that the second desire took precedence over the first, but it was not the ordinary woman that this future *Napoléon littéraire* was seeking. His desire was to win the affection of some lady of high standing, and when urged by his family to consider marriage with a certain rich widow of the *bourgeoisie,* it can be imagined with what a sense of relief he wrote his mother that the bird had flown. An abnormal longing to mingle with the aris-

tocracy remained with him throughout life; and during his stay at Wierzchownia, after having all but made the conquest of a very rich lady belonging to one of the most noted families of Russia, he flattered himself by exaggerating her greatness.

Not being crowned from the first with the success he desired, Balzac needed encouragement in his work. For this he naturally turned to women who would give him of their time and sympathy. In his early years, he received this encouragement and assistance from his sister Laure, from Madame de Berny, Madame d'Abrantès, Madame Carraud and others, and in his later life he was similarly indebted to Madame Hanska. They gave him ideas, corrected his style, conceived plots, furnished him with historical background, and criticized his work in general. Is it surprising then that, having received so much from women, he should have accorded them so great a place in his writings as well as in his personal life?

While Balzac did not, as is often stated, *create* the "woman of thirty," this characteristic type having already appeared in Madame de Staël's *Delphine,* in Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe,* and in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir,* he must be credited with having magnified her charms and presented her advantages and superiority to a much higher degree than had been done before. Women indeed play in general an important rôle in his work; many of his novels bear their names; about one-third of the stories of *La Comédie humaine* are dedicated to women; and while not quite so large a proportion of the characters created are women, they are numbered among the most important personages of his prolific fancy.

If we are to believe his own testimony, his popularity among women was by no means limited to his Paris environment, for he writes: "Fame is conveyed to me through the post office by means of letters, and I daily receive three or four from women. They come from the depths of Russia, of Germany, etc.; I have not had one from England. Then there are many letters from young people. It has become fatiguing. . . ." [2]

It was only a matter of justice that women should show their appreciation thus, for Balzac rendered them a gracious service in prolonging, by his enormous literary influence, the period of their eligibility for being loved. This he successfully extended to thirty years, even to forty years; with rare skill he portrayed the charm of a declining beauty — as one might delight in the glory of a brilliant autumn or of a setting sun. At the same time, and on the one hand, he depicted the young girl of various types, and women of the working and servant class. And since his own life is so reflected throughout his work, it is of interest to become acquainted with the inner and intimate side of his genius, which has left us some of the greatest documents we possess concerning human nature.

Balzac knew many women, and to understand him fully one should study his relations with them. If he has portrayed them well, it is because he loved them tenderly, and was loved by many in return. These feminine affections formed one of the consolations of his life; they not only gave him courage but helped to soften the bitterness of his trials and disappointments.

[2] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, p. 264, July 2, 1832. Letter to Madame Carraud.

While an effort has been made in the following work to solve the questions as to the identity of the *Sarah, Maria, Sofka, Constance-Victoire, Louise, Caroline,* and the *Hélène* of Balzac's dedications, and to show the rôle each played, no attempt has here been made to lift the tightly drawn veil which has so long enveloped one side of Balzac's private life. Whoever wishes to do this may now consult the recent publications of the late Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, or the *Mariage de Balzac* by the late Count Stanislas Rzewuski. It is far more pleasant — even if the charges be untrue — to think as did the late Miss K. P. Wormeley, that no supporting testimony has been offered to prove anything detrimental to the great author's character. Though doubtless much overdrawn, one prefers the delightful picture of him traced by his old friend, George Sand.[3]

[3] *Autour de la Table,* p. 210. See also E. de Mirecourt, *Les Contemporains: Balzac,* p. 46–49, and Théophile Gautier, *Portraits Contemporains,* p. 71, 72.

# WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF BALZAC

# CHAPTER I

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF BALZAC

In the delightful city of Tours, the childhood of Honoré de Balzac was spent in the midst of his family. This consisted of an original and most congenial old father, a nervous, business-like mother, two younger sisters, Laure and Laurentia, and a younger brother, Henri. His maternal grandmother, Madame Sallambier, joined the family after the death of her husband.

At about the age of eight, Honoré was sent to a semi-military *collège*. Here, after six years of confinement, he lost his health, not on account of any work assigned to him by his teachers, for he was regarded as being far from a brilliant student, but because of the abnormal amount of reading which he did on the outside. When he was brought home for recuperation, his old grandmother alternately irritated him with her "nervous attacks" and delighted him with her numerous ways of showing her affection. At this time he wandered about in the fresh air of the province of Touraine, and learned to love its beautiful scenery, which he has immortalized in various novels.

After he had spent a year of this rustic life, his family moved to Paris in the fall of 1814. There he continued his studies with M. Lepitre, whose Royalist principles doubtless influenced him. He attended lectures at the Sorbonne also, strolling meanwhile about the Latin Quarter, and in 1816 was placed in the law office of M. de Guil-

lonnet-Merville, a friend of the family, and an ardent Royalist. After eighteen months in this office, he spent more than a year in the office of a notary, M. Passez, who was also a family friend.

It was probably during this period of residence in Paris that he first met Madame de Berny, she who was later to wield so great an influence over him and who held first place in his heart until their separation in 1832. Probably at this same period, too, he met Zulma Tourangin, a schoolmate of his sister Laure, and who, as Madame Carraud, was to become his life-long friend. Of all the friendships that Balzac was destined to form with women, this with Madame Carraud was one of the purest, longest and most beautiful.

Having attained his majority and finished his legal studies, Balzac was requested by his father to enter the office of M. Passez and become a business man, but the life was so distasteful to him that he objected and asked permission to spend his time as best he might in developing his literary ability, a request which, in spite of the opposition of the family, was finally granted for a term of two years. He was accordingly allowed to establish himself in a small attic at No. 9 rue Lesdiguières, while the family moved to Villeparisis.

His father's weakness in thus giving in to his son was most irritating to Balzac's mother, who was endowed with the business faculties so frequently met with among French women. She was convinced that a little experience would soon cause her son to change his mind. But he, on his part, ignored his hardships. He began to dream of a life of fame. In his garret, too, he began to de-

velop that longing for luxury which was to increase with the years, and which was to cost him so much. At this time, he took frequent walks through the cemetery of Père-Lachaise around the graves of Molière, La Fontaine and Racine. He would occasionally visit a friend with whom he could converse, but he usually preferred a sympathetic listener, to whom he could pour out his plans and his innermost longings. Otherwise his life was as solitary as it was cloistered. He confined himself to his room for days at a time, working fiercely at the manuscript of the play, *Cromwell,* which he felt to be a masterpiece.

This work he finished and took to his home for approval in April, 1820. What must have been his disappointment when, certain of success, he not only found his play disapproved but was advised to devote his time and talents to anything except literature! But his courage was not daunted thus. Remarking that *tragedies* appeared not to be in his line, he was ready to return to his garret to attempt another kind of literature, and would have done so, had not his mother, seeing that he would certainly injure his health, interposed; and although only fifteen months of the allotted two years had expired, insisted that he remain at home, and later sent him to Touraine for a much needed rest.

During his stay at home, he was to suffer another disappointment. His sister Laure, to whom he had confided all his secrets and longings, was married to M. Surville in May, 1820, and moved to Bayeux. He was thus deprived of her congenial companionship. The separation is fortunate for posterity, however, since the letters he

wrote to her reveal much of the family life, both pleasant and otherwise, together with a great deal concerning his own desires and struggles. Thus early in life, he realized that his was a very "original" family, and regretted not being able to put the whole group into novels. His correspondence gives a very good description of their various eccentricities, and he has later immortalized some of these by portraying them in certain of his characters.

Continually worried by his irritable mother, feeling himself forced to make money by writing lest he be compelled to enter a lawyer's office, he produced in five years, with different collaborators, a vast number of works written under various pseudonyms. He tutored his younger and much petted brother Henri, but found his pleasures outside of the family circle. It was arranged that he should give lessons to one of the sons of M. and Mme. de Berny, and thus he had an opportunity of seeing much of Madame de Berny, whose patience under suffering and sympathetic nature deeply impressed him. On her side, she took an interest in him and devoted much time to helping and indeed "creating" him. Unhappy in her married life, she must have found the companionship of Balzac most interesting, and realizing that the young man had a great future, she acted as a severe critic in correcting his manuscripts, and cheered him in his hours of depression. Her mother having been one of the Queen's ladies in waiting, the Royalist principles previously instilled in the mind of the young author were reënforced by this charming woman, as well as by her mother, who could entertain him indefinitely with her exciting stories of imprisonments and hairbreadth escapes.

After a few years of life at Villeparisis, Balzac removed to Paris. He had met an old friend, M. d'Assonvillez, whom he told of the conflict between his family and himself over his occupation, and this gentleman advised him to seek a business that would make him independent, even offering to provide the necessary funds. Balzac took the advice, and with visions of becoming extremely rich, launched into a publishing career, proposing to bring out one-volume editions of various authors' complete works, commencing with La Fontaine and Molière. As he did not have the necessary capital for advertising, however, his venture resulted in a loss. His friend then persuaded him to invest in a printing-press, and in August, 1826, he made another beginning. He did not lack courage; but though he later manipulated such wonderful business schemes in his novels he proved to be utterly incapable himself in practical life.

A second time he was doomed to failure, but with his indomitable will he resolved that inasmuch as he had met with such financial disasters through the press, he would recover his fortunes in the same way, and set himself to writing with even greater determination than ever. Now it was that Madame de Berny showed her true devotion by coming to his aid in his financial troubles as well as in his literary ones; she loaned him 45,000 francs, saw to it that the recently purchased type-foundry became the property of her family, and, with the help of Madame Surville, persuaded Madame de Balzac to save her son from the disgrace of bankruptcy by lending him 37,000 francs. Thus, after less than two years of experience, he found himself burdened with a debt which like a black

cloud was to hang over him during his entire life. Other friends also came to his rescue. But if Balzac did not have business capacity, his experience in dealing with the financial world, of which he had become a victim, furnished him with material of which he made abundant use later in his works.

In September, 1828, after this business was temporarily out of the way, Balzac went to Brittany to spend a few weeks with some old family friends, the Pommereuls. There he roved over the beautiful country and collected the material for *Les Chouans,* the first novel which he signed with his own name. Notwithstanding the fact that before he had reached his thirtieth year, he was staggering under a debt amounting to about 100,000 francs, Balzac with his never-failing hope in the future and his ever-increasing belief in his destiny, cast aside his depression, and fought continually to attain the greatness which was never fully recognized until long after his death.

He had entered on what was indeed a period of struggle. Establishing himself in Paris in the rue de Tournon, and later in the rue de Cassini, he battled with poverty, lacking both food and clothing; but his courage never wavered. Drinking black coffee to keep himself awake, he wrote eighteen hours a day, and when exhausted would run away to the country to relax and visit with his friends. The Baron de Pommereul was only one of a rather numerous group. He frequently visited Madame Carraud at her hospitable home at Frapesle, and M. de Margonne in his château at Saché on the Indre. Often he would

spend many weeks at a time with the latter, where he made himself perfectly at home, was treated as one of the family, and worked or rested just as he wished. Leading the hermit's life by preference, he needed the quietude of the country atmosphere in order to recover from the great strain to which he subjected himself when the fit of authorship was upon him. Thus it happened that several of his works were written in the homes of various friends.

*Les Chouans* and other novels met with success. Balzac's reputation now gradually rose, so that by 1831 he was attracting much favorable attention. Among the younger literary set who sought his acquaintance was George Sand, with whom he formed a true friendship which lasted throughout his life. Now, too, though he was not betrayed into neglecting his work for society, he accepted invitations, won by his growing reputation, to some of the most noted salons of the day, among them the Empire salon of Madame Sophie Gay, where he met many of the literary and artistic people of the time, including Delphine, the daughter of Madame Gay, who, as Madame de Girardin, was to become one of his intimate friends. Here he met Madame Hamelin and the Duchesse d'Abrantès, who was destined to play an important rôle in his life, and also the tender and impassioned poetess, Madame Desbordes-Valmore. The beautiful Madame Récamier invited him to her salon, too, and had him read to her guests, and he was also a frequent visitor in the salon of the Russian Princess Bagration, where he was fond of telling stories. Besides the salons,

he was invited to numerous houses, dining particularly often with the Baron de Trumilly, who took a great interest in his work.

As his fame increased, letters arrived from various parts of Europe. Some of these were anonymous, and many were from women. Several of the latter were answered, and early in 1832 Balzac learned that one of his unknown correspondents was the beautiful Marquise de Castries.[1] Throwing aside her incognito, she invited him to call, and he, anxious to mingle with the exclusive society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, gladly accepted and promptly became enraptured with her alluring charm. It was doubtless owing to the influence of her relative, the Duc de Fitz-James, that he became active in politics at this time.

In the course of this same year (1832) there came to him an anonymous letter of great significance, dated from the distant Ukraine and signed *l'Étrangère*. Though not at the time giving him the slightest presentiment of the outcome, this letter was destined eventually to change the entire life of the novelist. A notice in the *Quotidienne* acknowledging the receipt of it brought about a correspondence which in the course of events revealed to the author that the stranger's real name was Madame Hanska.

Love affairs, however, were far from being the only things which occupied Balzac. He was continually besieged by creditors; the clouds of his indebtedness were ever ready to burst over his head. Meanwhile, his mother became more and more displeased with him, and impatient at his constant calls upon her for the performance

[1] Later the Duchess de Castries.

of all manner of services. She now urged him to make a rich marriage and thus put an end to his troubles and hers. But such was not Balzac's inclination, and he rightly considered himself the most deeply concerned in the matter.

All the while he was prodigiously productive, but the profits from his works were exceedingly small. This fact was due to his method of composition, according to which some of his works were revised a dozen times or more, and also to the Belgian piracies, from which all popular French authors suffered. In addition to this, his extravagant tastes developed from year to year, and thus prevented him from materially reducing his debts.

Unlike most Frenchmen, Balzac was particularly fond of travel in foreign countries, and when allured by the charms of a beautiful woman, he forgot his financial obligations and allowed nothing to prevent his responding to the call of the siren. Thus he was enticed by the Marquise de Castries to go to Aix and from there to Geneva in 1832, and one year later he rushed to Neufchâtel to meet Madame Hanska, with whom he became so enamored that a few months afterwards he spent several weeks with her at this same fatal city of Geneva where the Marquise had all but broken his heart. In the spring of 1835 he followed a similar desire, this time going as far as the beautiful city of the blue Danube.

The charms of his sirens were not enough, however, to keep so indefatigable a writer from his work. He permitted himself to enjoy social diversions for only a few hours daily and some of his most delightful novels were written during these visits, where it seemed that the

very shadow of feminine presence gave him inspiration. It should be added, too, that in the limited time given to society during these journeys, he not only worshiped at the shrine of his particular enchantress of the moment, but managed to meet many other women of social prominence.

As his fame spread, his extravagance increased; with his famous cane, he was seen frequently at the opera, at one time sharing a box with the beautiful Olympe. But his business relations with his publisher, Madame Béchet, which seemed to be promising at first, ended unhappily; and the rapidly declining health of his *Dilecta,* Madame de Berny, not to mention the failure of another publisher, Werdet, which there is not space here to recount, cast a gloom from time to time over his optimistic spirit. He now became the proprietor of the *Chronique de Paris,* but aside from the literary friendships involved, notably that of Théophile Gautier, he derived nothing but additional worries from an undertaking he was unfitted to carry out. An even greater anxiety was the famous lawsuit with Buloz, which was finally decided in his favor, but which proved a costly victory, since it left him physically exhausted.

In order to recuperate, he sought refuge in the home of M. de Margonne, and traveled afterwards with Madame Marbouty to Italy, where he spent several pleasant weeks looking after some legal business for his friends, M. and Mme. Visconti. It was on his return from this journey that he learned of the death of Madame de Berny.

During this period of general depression, Balzac de-

voted a certain amount of attention to another correspondent, Louise, whom he never met but whose letters cheered him, especially during his imprisonment for refusing to serve in the Garde Nationale. In the same year (1836), he was drawn by the charming Madame de Valette to Guérande, where he secured his descriptive material for *Béatrix*.

In the spring of 1837 he went to Italy for the second time, hoping to recuperate, and wishing to see the bust of Madame Hanska which had been made by Bartolini. He visited several cities, and in Milan he was received in the salon of Madame Maffei, where he met some of the best known people of the day. He had now thought of another scheme by means of which he might become very rich,— always a favorite dream of his. He believed that much silver might be extracted from lead turned out of the mines as refuse, and was indiscreet enough to confide his ideas to a crafty merchant whom he met at Genoa. A year later, when Balzac went to Sardinia to investigate the possibility of the development of his plans, he found that his ideas had been appropriated by this acquaintance. On his return from this trip to Corsica and Sardinia, on which he had endured much physical suffering, and had spent much money to no financial avail, he stopped again at Milan to look after the interests of the Viscontis. In the Salon of this same year (1837), the famous portrait by Boulanger was displayed. About the same time, together with Théophile Gautier, Léon Gozlan, Jules Sandeau and others, he organized an association called the *Cheval Rouge* for mutual advertisement.

Balzac now bought a piece of land at Ville d'Avray

(Sèvres), and had a house built, *Les Jardies,* which afforded much amusement to the Parisians. He went there to reside in 1838 while the walls were still damp. Here he formed another scheme for becoming rich, this time in the belief that he would be successful in raising pine-apples at his new home. *Les Jardies* was a three-story house. The principal stairway was on the outside, because an exterior staircase would not interfere with the symmetrical arrangement of the interior. The garden walls, not long after completion, fell down as they had no foundations, and Balzac sadly exclaimed over their giving way! After a brief residence here of about two years, he fled from his creditors and concealed his identity under the name of his housekeeper, Madame de Brugnolle, in a mysterious little house, No. 19, rue Basse, Passy.

Aside from his novels, which were appearing at a most rapid rate, Balzac wrote many plays, but they all met with failure for various reasons. Other literary activities, such as his brief directorship of the *Revue Parisienne,* numerous articles and short stories, and his coöperation in the *Société des Gens-de-Lettres,* which was organized to protect the rights of authors and publishers, occupied much of his precious time; in addition, he had his unremitting financial struggles.

This "child-man," however, with his imagination, optimism, belief in magnetism and clairvoyance, and great steadfastness of character, kept on hoping. Not discouraged by his ever unsuccessful schemes for becoming a millionaire, he conceived the project of digging for hidden treasures, and later thought of making a fortune by transporting to France oaks grown in distant Russia.

Mme. Récamier

From the miniature by David, in the Morgan collection

In the spring of 1842 Balzac's novels were collected for the first time under the name of the *Comédie humaine.* This was shortly after one of the most important events of his life had occurred, when on January 5 he received a letter from Madame Hanska telling of the death of her husband the previous November. Balzac wished to leave for Russia immediately, but Madame Hanska's permission was not forthcoming, and it was not until July of 1843 that Balzac arrived at St. Petersburg to visit his "Polar Star."

On his return home he became very ill, and from this time onward his robust constitution, which he had so abused by overwork and by the use of strong coffee, began to break under the continual strain and his illnesses became more and more frequent. His visit to his *Châtelaine,* however, had increased his longing to be constantly in her society, and he was ever planning to visit her. During her prolonged stay in Dresden in the winter and spring of 1845, he became so desperate that he could no longer do his accustomed work, and when the invitation to visit her eventually came, he forgot all in his haste to be at her side.

With Madame Hanska, her daughter Anna, and the Count George Mniszech, Anna's fiancé, Balzac now traveled extensively in Europe. In July, after some preliminary journeys, Madame Hanska and Anna secretly accompanied him to Paris where they enjoyed the opportunity of visiting Anna's former governess, Lirette, who had entered a convent. In August, after visiting many cities with the two ladies, Balzac escorted them as far as Brussels. In September he left Paris again to join them

at Baden, and in October, went to meet them at Châlons whence all four — Count Mniszech being now of the party — journeyed to Marseilles and by sea to Naples. After a few days at Naples, Balzac returned to Paris, ill, having spent much money and done little work.

Ever planning a home for his future bride, and buying objects of art with which to adorn it, Balzac with his numerous worries was physically and mentally in poor condition. In March, 1846, he left Paris to join Madame Hanska and her party at Rome for a month. He traveled with them to some extent during the summer, and a definite engagement of marriage was entered into at Strasbourg. In October he attended the marriage of Anna and the Count Mniszech at Wiesbaden, and Madame Hanska visited him secretly in Paris during the winter, returning some weeks later to her home at Wierzchownia.

He was now in better spirits, and his health was somewhat improved, enabling him to do some of his best work, but he was being pressed to fulfil his literary obligations, and, as usual, harassed over his debts. In September he left for Wierzchownia, where he remained until the following February, continually hoping that his marriage would soon take place. But Mme. Hanska hesitated, and the failure of the Chemin de Fer du Nord added more financial embarrassments to his already large load. The Revolution of 1848 brought him into more trouble still, and his health was obviously becoming impaired. Yet he continued hopeful.

After spending the summer in his house of treasures in the rue Fortunée, he again left, in September, 1848, for Wierzchownia, this time determined to return with his

shield or upon it. During his prolonged stay of eighteen months, while his distraught mother was looking after affairs in his new home, his health became so bad that he could not finish the work outlined during the summer. No sooner had he recovered from one malady than he was overtaken by another. Unable to work, distracted by bad news from his family, and being the witness of several financial failures incurred by Madame Hanska, Balzac naturally was supremely depressed. At this time, a touch of what may not uncharitably be termed snobbishness is seen in his letters to his family when he extols the unlimited virtues of his *Prédilecta* and the Countess Anna.

After seventeen long years of waiting, with hope constantly deferred, Balzac at last attained his goal when, on March 14, 1850, Madame Hanska became Madame Honoré de Balzac. His joy over this great triumph was beyond all adequate description, but he was unable to depart for Paris with his bride until April. After a difficult journey, the couple arrived at Paris in May, but the condition of Balzac's health was hopeless and only a few more months were accorded him. With his usual optimism, he always thought that he would be spared to finish his great work, and when informed by his physician on August 17 that he would live but a few hours, he refused to believe it.

Unless he had been self-centered, Balzac could never have left behind him his enormous and prodigious work. In spite of certain unlovely phases of his private character and his failure to fulfil his literary and financial obligations, he was a man of great personal charm. Though at various times he was under consideration for election to

the French Academy, his name is not found numbered among the " forty immortals." But he was the greatest of French novelists, a great creator of characters, who by some competent critics has been ranked with Shakespeare, and he has left to posterity the incomparable, though unfinished *Comédie humaine,* which is in itself sufficient for his " immortality."

# CHAPTER II

## RELATIVES AND FAMILY FRIENDS

### BALZAC'S MOTHER

"Farewell, my dearly beloved mother! I embrace you with all my heart. Oh! if you knew how I need just now to cast myself on your breast as a refuge of complete affection, you would insert a little word of tenderness in your letters, and this one which I am answering has not even a poor kiss. There is nothing but . . . Ah! Mother, Mother, this is very bad! . . . You have misconstrued what I said to you, and you do not understand my heart and affection. This grieves me most of all! . . ."[1]

The above extract is sadly typical of a relationship of thirty years, 1820–1850, between a mother, on the one hand, who never understood or appreciated her son — and a son, on the other, whose longings for maternal affection were never fully gratified.

Madame Surville[2] has described Balzac's mother, and her own, as being rich, beautiful, and much younger than her husband, and as having a rare vivacity of mind and of imagination, an untiring activity, a great firmness of decision, and an unbounded devotion to her family;

[1] Balzac, *Correspondance,* 1819–1850, v. 1, p. 201, September 22, 1832.

[2] *Balzac, sa Vie et ses Œuvres,* p. 13–15. To his mother Balzac dedicated *Le Médicin de Campagne,* one of his finest sociological studies.

but as expressing herself in actions rather than in words. She devoted herself exclusively to the education of her children, and felt it necessary to use severity towards them in order to offset the effects of indulgence on the part of their father and their grandmother. Balzac inherited from his mother imagination and activity, and from both of his parents energy and kindness.

Madame de Balzac has been charged with not having been a tender mother towards her children in their infancy. She had lost her first child through her inability to nurse it properly. An excellent nurse, however, was found for Honoré, and he became so healthy that later his sister Laure was placed with the same nurse. But she never seemed fully to understand her son nor even to suspect his promise. She attributed the sagacious remarks and reflections of his youth to accident, and on such occasions she would tell him that he did not understand what he was saying. His only reply would be a sweet, submissive smile which irritated her, and which she called arrogant and presumptious. With her cold, calculating temperament, she had no patience with his staking his life and fortune on uncertain financial undertakings, and blamed him for his business failures. She suffered on account of his love of luxury and his belief in his own greatness, no evidence of which seemed sufficient to her matter-of-fact mind. She continued to misjudge him, unaware of his genius, but in spite of her grumbling and harassing disposition, she often came to his aid in his financial troubles.

Contrary to the wishes of his parents, who had destined him to become a notary, Balzac was ever dreaming of

literary fame. His mother not unnaturally thought that a little poverty and difficulty would bring him to submission; so, before leaving Paris for Villeparisis in 1819 she installed him in a poorly furnished *mansard,* No. 9, rue Lesdiguières, leaving an old woman, Madame Comin, who had been in the service of the family for more than twenty years, to watch over him. Balzac has doubtless depicted this woman in *Facino Cane* as Madame Vaillant, who in 1819–1820 was charged with the care of a young writer, lodged in a *mansard,* rue Lesdiguières.

After fifteen months of this life, his health became so much impaired that his mother insisted on keeping him at home, where she cared for him faithfully. On a former occasion Madame de Balzac had had her son brought home to recuperate, for when he was sent away to *collège* at an early age, his health became so impaired that he was hurriedly returned to his home. Balzac probably refers to this event in his life when he writes, in *Louis Lambert,* that the mother, alarmed by the continuous fever of her son and his symptoms of *coma,* took him from school at four or five hours' notice.

During the five years (1820–1825) that Balzac remained at home in Villeparisis, he longed for the quiet freedom of his garret; he could not adapt himself to the bustling family circle, nor reconcile himself to the noise of the domestic machinery kept in motion by his vigilant and indefatigable mother. She was of a nervous, excitable nature, which she probably inherited from her mother, Madame Sallambier. She imagined that she was ill, and of course there was no one to convince her to the contrary. Had she known that while she thought she

was contributing everything to the happiness of those around her, she was only doing the opposite, we may be sure that she of all women would have been the most wretched.

Balzac having failed in his speculations as publisher and printer, was aided by his mother financially, and she figured as one of his principal creditors during the remainder of his life.[3]

M. Auguste Fessart was a contemporary of the family, an observer of a great part of the life of Honoré, and his confidant on more than one occasion. In his *Commentaires* on the work entitled *Balzac, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres,* by Madame Surville, he states that the portrait of Madame de Balzac is flattering — a daughter's portrait of a mother — and declares that Madame de Balzac was very severe with her children, especially with Honoré, adding that Balzac used to say that he never heard his mother speak without experiencing a certain trembling which deprived him of his faculties. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, in reviewing the *Commentaires* of M. Fessart, notes the recurring instances in which pity is expressed for the moral and material sufferings almost constantly endured by Balzac in his family circle. These sufferings seem to have impressed him more than anything else in the career of the novelist. In speaking of Balzac's financial appeal to his family, M. Fessart notes: "And his mother did not respond to him. She let him die of hunger! . . . I repeat that they let him die of hunger; he told me so several times!" When Madame

[3] É. Faguet, *Balzac,* p. 12, is exaggerating in stating that Madame de Balzac sacrificed her whole fortune for Honoré, for much of her means was spent on her favorite son, Henri.

Surville speaks of their keeping Balzac's presence in Paris a secret, saying that it was moreover a means of keeping him from all worldly temptation, M. Fessart replies: "And of giving him nothing, and of allowing him to be in need of everything!" [4] Finally, when Madame Surville (p. 75) speaks of her parents' not giving Balzac the fifteen hundred francs he desired, M. Fessart confirms this, saying that his family always refused him money.

A letter from Balzac to Madame Hanska testifies to this attitude of his family towards him: "In 1828 I was cast into this poor rue Cassini, in consequence of a liquidation to which I had been compelled, owing one hundred thousand francs and being without a penny, when my family would not even give me bread." [5]

MM. Hanotaux et Vicaire, to whose admirable work we shall have occasion to refer often, state that Madame de Balzac advanced thirty-seven thousand six hundred francs for Balzac on August 16, 1822, and that his parents paid a total of forty-five thousand francs for him.[6]

Having read M. Fessart's description of Madame de Balzac, one can agree with Madame Ruxton in saying that Balzac has portrayed his own youth in his account of the early life of Raphael in *La Peau de Chagrin*, Balzac's mother, instead of Raphael's father, being recognized in the following passage:

"Seen from afar, my life appears to contract by some

[4] *Une Page Perdue de H. de Balzac*, 116–128.
[5] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 414, July 12, 1837.
[6] *La Jeunesse de Balzac*, p. 94–96.

mental process. That long, slow agony of ten years' duration can be brought to memory to-day in some few phrases, in which pain is resolved into a mere idea, and pleasure becomes a philosophical reflection . . . When I left school, my father submitted me to a strict discipline; he installed me in a room near his own study, and I had to rise at five in the morning and retire at nine at night. He intended me to take my law studies seriously. I attended school, and read with an advocate as well; but my lectures and work were so narrowly circumscribed by the laws of time and space, and my father required of me such a strict account, at dinner, that . . . In this manner I cowered under as strict a despotism as a monarch's until I became of age."

In confirmation of this idea, Madame Ruxton [7] quotes Madame Barnier, granddaughter of the Duchesse d'Abrantès, who knew both Balzac and his mother, and who describes her as a cold, severe, superior, but hard-hearted woman, just the opposite of her son. Balzac himself states: "Never shall I cease to resemble Raphael in his garret." [8]

After the death (June 1829) of her husband, Madame de Balzac lived with her son at different intervals, and during his extended tour of six months in 1832 she attended to the details of his business. With her usual energy and extreme activity, she displayed her ability in various lines, for she had to have dealings with his pub-

[7] *La Dilecta de Balzac,* p. 8–11. Balzac states that he has described his own life in *La Peau de Chagrin.* For a picture of Balzac's unhappy childhood drawn by himself, see *Revue des deux Mondes,* March 15, 1920, pp. 310, 311.

[8] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 54, October 12, 1833.

lisher, do copying, consult the library,— sending him some books and buying others,— have the servant exercise the horses, sell the horses and carriage and dismiss the servant, arrange to have certain payments deferred, send him money and consult the physician for him, not to mention various other duties.

While Madame de Balzac was certainly requested to do far more than a son usually expects of his mother, her tantalizing letters were a source of great annoyance to him, as is seen in the following:

"What you say about my silence is one of those things which, to use your expression, makes me grasp my heart with both hands; for it is incredible I should be able to produce all I do. (I am obeying the most rigorous necessity); so if I am to write, I ought to have more time, and when I rest, I wish to lay down and not take up my pen again. Really, my poor dear mother, this ought to be understood between us once for all; otherwise, I shall have to renounce all epistolary intercourse. . . . And this morning I was about to make the first dash at my work, when your letter came and completely upset me. Do you think it is possible to have artistic inspirations after being brought suddenly face to face with such a picture of my miseries as you have traced? Do you think that if I did not feel them, I should work as I do? . . . Farewell, my good mother. Try and achieve impossibilities, which is what I am doing on my side. My life is one perpetual miracle. . . . You ask me to write you in full detail; but, my dear mother, have you yet to be told what my existence is? When I am able to write, I work at my manuscripts; when I am not working at my manuscripts, I am thinking of them; I never have any rest. How is it my friends are

not aware of this? . . . I beg of you, my dear mother, in the name of my heavy work, never to write me that such a work is good, and such another bad: you upset me for a fortnight." [9]

Balzac appreciated what his mother did for him, and while he never fully repaid her the money she had so often requested of him, she might have felt herself partially compensated by these words of affection:

"My kind and excellent mother,— After writing to you in such haste, I felt my inmost heart melt as I read your letter again, and I worshipped you. How shall I return to you, when shall I return to you, and can I ever return to you, by my love and endeavors for your happiness, all that you have done for me? I can at present only express my deep thankfulness. . . . How deep is my gratitude towards the kind hearts who pluck some of the thorns from my life and smooth my path by their affection. But constrained to an unceasing warfare against destiny, I have not always leisure to give utterance to what I feel. I would not, however, allow a day to pass without letting you know the tenderness your late proofs of devotion excite in me. A mother suffers the pangs of labor more than once with her children, does she not, my mother? Poor mothers, are you ever enough beloved! . . . I hope, my much beloved mother, you will not let yourself grow dejected. I work as hard as it is possible for a man to work; a day is only twelve hours long, I can do no more. . . . Farewell, my darling mother; I am very tired!

[9] Madame Surville, *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, 268–277, July, 1832, p. 325, September 30, (1832). The writer is not responsible for the English of the quotations drawn from this book. (See bibliography to the present volume, p. 287.)

Coffee hurts my stomach. For the last twenty days I have taken no rest; and yet I must still work on, that I may remove your anxieties. . . . Keep your house; I had already sent an answer to Laura, I will not let either you or Surville bear the burden of my affairs. However, until the arrival of my proxy, it is understood that Laura, who is my cash keeper, will remit you a hundred and fifty francs a month. You may reckon on this as a regular payment; nothing in the world will take precedence of it. Then, at the end of November to December 10, you will have the surplus of the thirty-six thousand francs to reimburse you for the excess of the expenditure over the receipts during the time of your stewardship; during which, thanks to your devotion, you gave me all the tranquility that was possible. . . . I entreat you to take care of yourself! Nothing is so dear to me as your health! I would give half of myself to keep you well, and I would keep the other half, to do you service. My mother, the day when we shall be happy through me is coming quickly; I am beginning to gather the fruits of the sacrifices I have made this year for a more certain future. Still, a few months more and I shall be able to give you that happy life — that life without cares or anxiety — which you so much need. You will have all you desire; our little vanities will be satisfied no less than the great ambitions of our hearts. Oh do, I pray you, nurse yourself! . . . Your comfort in material things and your happiness are my riches. Oh! my dear mother, do live to see my bright future realized!" [10]

[10] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 295–297, August 27, 1832, p. 337, October 9, 1832, pp. 342, 343, November 5, 1832, pp. 410, 411, November, 1834. In speaking of Balzac's relations to his mother, Mr. F. Lawton (*Balzac,* p. 77) states: "Madame Balzac was sacrificed to his improvidence and stupendous egotism; nor can the tender-

Thus did the poor mother alternately receive letters full of scoldings and of terms of endearment from her son whose genius she never understood. She was faithful in her duties, and her ambitious son probably did not realize how much he was asking of her. But she may have had a motive in keeping him on the prolonged visit during which this last letter was written, for she was interested in his prospective marriage. Although her full name is never mentioned, the woman in question, Madame D——, was evidently a widow with a fortune, and in view of this prospect was most pleasing to Madame de Balzac. However, this matrimonial plan fell through, and Balzac himself was never enthusiastic over it. He felt that his attentions to Madame D—— would consume his very precious time, and that the affair could not come off in time to serve his interests. Could it be that Balzac was alluding to this same Madame D—— when he wrote some time later: "My beloved mother,— the affair has come to nothing, the bird was frightened away, and I am very glad of it. I had no time to run after it, and it was imperative it should be either yes or no." [11]

This marriage project, like many others planned either for or by Balzac, came to naught, and his mother evidently became displeased with him, for she left him on his return, when he was in great need of consolation and sympathy. As frequently happened under such circumstances, Balzac expressed his deep regrets at his mother's

ness of his language — more frequently than not called forth by some fresh immolation of her comfort to his interests — disguise this unpleasing side of his character and action. . . . And his epistolary good-byes were odd mixtures of business with sentiment."

[11] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac* v. 2, p. 7, July 19, 1835.

conduct to one of his best friends, Madame Carraud, and confided to her his loneliness and longings.

Madame de Balzac was much occupied with religious ideas, and had made a collection of the writings of the mystics. Balzac plunged into the study of clairvoyance and mesmerism, and his mother, interested in the marvelous, helped him in his studies, as she knew many of the celebrated clairvoyants and mesmerists of the time.

At various times, Balzac's relations with his mother were much estranged; at one time he did not even know where she was. When she was disappointed in her favorite child, Henri, she seemed to recognize the great wrong involved in her lack of affection for Honoré and his sister Laure. But she never gave him the attentions that he longed for. In May, 1840, he wrote to Madame Hanska that he was especially sad on the day of his *fête catholique* (May 16) as, since the death of Madame de Berny, there was no one to observe this occasion, though during her life every day was a *fête* day; he was too busy to join with his sister Laure in the mutual observance of their birthdays, and his mother cared little for him; once the Duchesse de Castries had sent him a most beautiful bouquet,— but now there was no one.

The same year (1840) he took his mother to live with him *Aux jardies.* This he regarded as an additional burden. Her continual harassing him for the money he still owed her, her nervous and discordant disposition, her constant intrigues to force him to marry, and her numerous little acts that placed him in positions beneath the

dignity of an author's standing were an incessant source of annoyance to him.

She did not remain with him long, but he tried to perform his filial duties and make her comfortable, as various letters show. One of these reads as follows:

"My dear Mother,— It is very difficult for me to enter into the engagement you ask of me, and to do so without reflection would entail consequences most serious both for you and for myself. The money necessary for my existence is, as it were, wrung from what should go to pay my debts, and hard work it is to get it. The sort of life I lead is suitable for no one; it wears out relations and friends; all fly from my dreary house. My affairs will become more and more difficult to manage, not to say impossible. The failure of my play, as regards money, still further complicates my situation. I find it impossible to work in the midst of all the little storms raised up in a household where the members do not live in harmony. My work has become feeble during the last year, as any one can see. I am in doubt what to do. But I must come to some determination within a few days. When my furniture has been sold, and when I have disposed of 'Les Jardies,' I shall not have much left. And I shall find myself alone in the world with nothing but my pen, and an attic. In such a situation shall I be able to do more for you than I am doing at this moment? I shall have to live from hand to mouth by writing articles which I can no longer write with the agility of youth which is mine no more. The world, and even relations, mistake me; I am engrossed by my work, and they think I am absorbed in myself. I am not blind to the fact, that up to

Mme. Emile de Girardin

(Mlle. Delphine Gay)

the present moment, working as I work, I have not succeeded in paying my debts, nor in supporting myself. No future will save me. I must do something else, look out for some other position. And it is at a time like this that you ask me to enter into such an engagement! Two years ago I should have done so, and have deceived myself. Now all I can say is, come to me and share my crust. You were in a tolerable position; I had a domestic whose devotion spared you all the worry of housekeeping; you were not called on to enter into every detail, you were quiet and peaceful. You wished me to count for something in your life, when it was imperative for you to forget my existence and allow me the entire liberty without which I can do nothing. It is not a fault in you, it is the nature of women. Now everything is changed. If you wish to come back, you will have to bear a little of the burden which is about to weigh me down, and which hitherto has only pressed upon you because you chose to take it on yourself. All this is business, and in no way involves my affection for you, which is always the same; so believe in the tenderness of your devoted son." [13]

Later, when Balzac purchased his home in the rue Fortunée, his mother had the care of it while he was in Russia. He asked her to visit the house weekly and to keep the servants on the alert by enquiring as though she expected him; yet Balzac wrote his nieces to have their grandmother visit them often, lest she carry too far the duties she imposed on herself in looking after his little home. He cautioned her to allow no one to enter the house, to insist that his old servant François be discreet,

[12] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, p. 176–178, April, 1842.

and especially that she be prudent in not talking about his plans; and that by all means she should take a carriage while attending to his affairs; this request was not only from him but also from Madame Hanska.

She was most faithful in looking after his home and watching the workmen to see that his instructions were carried out. In fact, she never left the house except when, on one occasion, owing to the excessive odors of the paint, she spent two nights in Laure's home.

Balzac's stay at Wierzchownia, however, was far from tranquil, for his mother was discontented with the general aspect of his affairs and increased his vexations by writing a letter in which she addressed him as *vous,* declaring that her affection was conditional on his behavior, a thing he naturally resented. "To think," he writes, "of a mother reserving the right to love a son like me, seventy-two years on the one side, and fifty on the other!" [13]

This letter caused a serious complication in his affairs in Russia, but the mother evidently became reconciled for a few months later she wrote to him expressing her joy at the news of his recovery, and asking him to extend to his friends her most sincere thanks for their care of him in his serious illness. Aside from knowing of his illness and her inability to see him, she was most happy in feeling that he was with such good friends.

She complained of his not writing oftener, but he replied that he had written to her seven times during his absence, that the letters were posted by his hostess and that he did not wish to abuse the hospitality with which

[13] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 354, March 22, 1849.

he was so royally and magnificently entertained. He resented his mother's dictating to him, a man fifty years of age, as to how often he should write to his nieces, for while he enjoyed receiving their letters, he thought they should feel honored in receiving letters from him whenever he had time to write to them.

When the poor mother attempted to be gracious to her son by sending him a box of bonbons, she only brought him trouble, for she packed it in newspapers, and in passing the custom-house, it was taken out and the candy crushed. Instead of thanking her for her good intentions, he rebuked her for her stupidity in regard to sending printed matter into Russia, as it endangered his stay there.

Balzac was always striving to pay his mother his long-standing indebtedness, but the Revolution of 1848, in connection with his continued illness, made this impossible. This burden of debt was also, at this time, preventing his obtaining a successful termination of his mission to Russia, for, as he explained to his mother, the lady concerned did not care to marry him while he was still encumbered with debt. Being a woman past forty, she desired that nothing should disturb the tranquillity in which she wished to live.

Owing to this critical situation and to his poor health, Balzac had repeatedly requested his mother never to write depressing news to him, but she paid little attention to this request and sent him a letter hinting at trouble in so vague a manner and with such disquieting expressions that, in his extremely nervous condition, it might have proved fatal to him. Yet it did not affect him so seri-

ously as it did Madame Hanska, who read the letter to him, for, owing to his terrible illness and the method of treatment, his eyes had become so weak that he could no longer see in the evening. Madame Hanska was so deeply interested in everything that concerned Balzac that this news made her very ill. For them to live in suspense for forty days without knowing anything definite was far worse than it would have been had his mother enumerated in detail the various misfortunes. From the preceding revelations of the disposition of Madame de Balzac, one can easily understand how it happened that her son has immortalized some of her traits in the character of *Cousine Bette.*

During the remainder of Balzac's stay in the Ukraine, he was preoccupied with the thought of his mother having every possible comfort, with his becoming acclimatized in Russia,— impossible though it was for him in his condition,— and above all with the realization of his long-cherished hope. But he cautioned his mother to observe the greatest discretion in regard to this hope, for "such things are never certain until one leaves the church after the ceremony." [14]

What must have been his feeling of triumph when he was able to write:

> "My very dear Mother,— Yesterday, at seven in the morning, thanks be to God, my marriage was blessed and celebrated in the church of Saint Barbara, at Berditchef, by the deputy of the Bishop of Jitomir. Monseigneur wished to have married me himself, but being unable, he

[14] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 389, March 11, 1850.

sent a holy priest, the Count Abbé Czarouski, the eldest of the glories of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, as his representative. Madame Eve de Balzac, your daughter-in-law, in order to make an end of all obstacles, has taken an heroic and sublimely maternal resolution, viz., to give up all her fortune to her children, only reserving an annuity to herself. . . . There are now two of us to thank you for all the good care you have taken of our house, as well as to testify to you our respectful *tendresses*." [15]

Balzac was not only anxious that his bride should be properly received, but also that his mother should preserve her dignity. On their way home he writes her from Dresden to have the house ready for their arrival (May 19, 20, 21), urging that she go either to her own home or to Laure's, for it would not be proper for her to receive her daughter-in-law in the rue Fortunée, and that she should not call until his wife had called on her. After reminding her again not to forget to procure flowers, he suggests that owing to his extremely feeble health he meet her at Laure's, for there he would have one less flight of stairs to climb. These suggestions, however, were unnecessary, as his mother had been ill in bed for several weeks in Laure's house.

After the novelist's return to Paris with his bride, his physical condition was such that in spite of the efforts of his beloved physician, Dr. Nacquart, little could be done for him, and he was destined to pass away within a short time. Balzac's mother, she with whom he had had so many misunderstandings, she who had doubtless never

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 391, March 15, 1850.

fully appreciated his greatness but who had sacrificed her physical strength and worldly goods for his sake, an old woman of almost seventy-two years, showed her true maternal love by remaining with her glorious and immortal son in his last moments.

### MADAME SURVILLE — MADAME MALLET — MADAME DUHAMEL

"To the Casket containing all things delightful; to the Elixir of Virtue, of Grace, and of Beauty; to the Gem, to the Prodigy of all Normandy; to the Pearl of Bayeux; to the Fairy of St. Laurence; to the Madonna of the Rue Teinture; to the Guardian Angel of Caen; to the Goddess of Enchanting Spells; to the Treasury of all Friendship — to Laura!" [16]

Two years younger than Balzac, his sister, Laure, not only played an important part in his life, but after his death rendered valuable service by writing his life and publishing a part of his correspondence.[17] Being reared by the same nurse as he, and having had the same home environment, she was the first of his intimate companions, and throughout a large part of his life remained one of the most sympathetic of all his confidantes. As children they loved each other tenderly, and his chivalrous protection of her led to his being punished more than once

[16] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, p. 165, 1822.

[17] MM. Hanotaux et Vicaire, *Le Jeunesse de Balzac*, p. 3, 4, have correctly observed that Balzac's sister, Madame Surville, has written a most delicate and interesting book, but that she has not correctly portrayed her brother because she was blinded by her devotion to him.

without betraying her childish guilt. Once when she arrived in time to confess, he asked her to avow nothing the next time, as he liked to be scolded for her.

He it was who accompanied her to dances, but having had the misfortune to slip and fall on one such occasion he was so sensitive to the amused smiles of the ladies that he gave up dancing, and decided to dominate society otherwise than by the graces and talents of the drawing-room. Thus it was that he became merely a spectator of these festivities, the memory of which he utilized later.

It was to Laure that, in the strictest confidence, he sent the plan of his first work, the tragedy *Cromwell,* writing at the top of his letter: "For yourself alone,"— wishing it to be a surprise to the rest of the family when finished. To her he looked for moral support, asking her to have faith in him, for he needed some one to believe in him. To her also he confided his ambitions early in his career, saying that his two greatest desires were to be famous and to be loved.

Laure was married in May, 1820, to M. Midi de la Greneraye Surville, and moved from her home in Villeparisis to Bayeux. When she became homesick Balzac wrote her cheerful letters, suggesting various means of employing her time. His admiration of her was such that he even asked her to select for him a wife of her own type. He explained to her that his affection was not diminished an atom by distance or by silence, for there are torrents which make a terrible to-do and yet their beds are dry in a few days, and there are waters which flow quietly, but flow forever.

Madame Surville seems to have been the impersona-

tion of discretion and appreciation; she was intimately acquainted with all the characters in his work and made valuable suggestions; he was most happy when discussing plans with her. He longed to have his glory reflect on his family and make the name of Balzac illustrious. When carried away with some beautiful idea, he seemed to hear her tender voice encouraging him. He felt that were it not for her devotion to the duties of her home, their intimacy might have become even more precious, and that stimulated by a literary atmosphere she might herself have become a writer.

He consulted her frequently with regard to literary help, once asking her to use all her cleverness in writing out fully her ideas on the subject of the *Deux Rencontres,* about which she had told him, for he wished to insert them in the *Femme de trente Ans.* As early as 1822 she received a similar request asking her to prepare for him a manuscript of the *Vicaire des Ardennes;* she was to prepare the first volume and he would finish it. And many years later (1842), Balzac asked his sister to furnish him with ideas for a story for young people. After the name of this story had been changed a few times, it was published under the title of *Un Début dans la Vie.* This explains why Balzac used the following words in dedicating it to her:[18] "To Laure. May the brilliant and modest intellect that gave me the subject of this scene have the honor of it!" This, however, was not the first time he had honored her by dedicating one of his

[18] For details, see S. de Lovenjoul, *Un Roman d'Amour, Les Avatars d'un Roman,* pp. 162, 163.

works to her, for in 1835 he inscribed to "Almae Sorori" a short story, *Les Proscrits*.

Balzac was often depressed, and felt that even his own family was not in sympathy with his efforts; he told his sister that the universe would be startled at his works before his relations or friends would believe in their existence. Yet he knew that they did appreciate him to a certain extent, for his sister wrote him that in reading the *Recherche de l'Absolu*, and thinking that her own brother was the author of it, she wept for joy.

In his youth, at all events, Balzac seems to have had no secrets from his sister, and it is to her that the much disputed letter of Saturday, October 12, 1833, was addressed.[19] Their friendship was sincere and devoted; and yet there were coolnesses, caused largely by the influence of their mother,— and of M. Surville, whose jealous and tyrannical disposition prevented their seeing each other as frequently as they would have liked. She once celebrated her birthday by visiting her brother, but she held her watch in her hand as she had only twenty minutes for the meeting. For awhile, he could not visit her; later, this estrangement was overcome, and after the first presentation of his play *Vautrin* (1840), his sister cared for him in her home during his illness.

Madame Surville performed many duties for her brother, but was not always skilful in allaying the demands of his creditors. On Balzac's return from a visit

[19] For this letter in full and its authenticity, see *Roman d'Amour*, pp. 79–88. For discussion of the authenticity of this letter, see K. P. Wormeley, *Memoir of Balzac*, Appendix *Vindication of Balzac*.

to Madame Hanska in Vienna, he found that his affairs were in great disorder, and that his sister, frightened at the conditions, had pawned his silverware. In planning at a later date to leave France, however, he did not hesitate to entrust his treasures to his sister, saying that she would be a most faithful "dragon." He was also wisely thoughtful of her; on one occasion when she had gone to a masked ball contrary to her husband's wishes, Balzac went after her and took her home without giving her time to go round the room.

She evidently had more influence over their mother than had he, for he asked her when on the verge of taking Madame de Balzac into his home again, to assist him in making her reasonable:

> "If she likes, she can be very happy, but tell her that she must encourage happiness and not frighten it away. She will have near her a confidential attendant and a servant, and she will be taken care of in the way she likes. Her room is as elegant as I can make it. . . . Make her promise not to object to what I wish her to do as regards her dress; I do not wish her to be dressed otherwise than as she *ought to be,* it would give me great pain . . ." [20]

During his prolonged stay in Russia, he requested his sister to conceal from their mother the true condition of his illness and the uncertainty of his marriage, and to entreat her to avoid anything in her letters which might cause him pain. Feeling that she would never have allowed such a thing had she known of it, he informed

[20] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 173, November, 1840.

her in detail concerning their mother's letter which had caused him endless trouble.

While Madame Surville was a great stimulus to Balzac early in his literary career, she in turn received the deepest sympathy from him in her financial struggle, and, while he was so happy and was living in such luxury in Russia, he only regretted that he could not assist her, for he had enjoyed hospitality in her home.

Madame Surville had at least one of her mother's traits — that of continually harassing Balzac by trying to marry him to some rich woman; once she had even chosen for him the goddaughter of Louis-Philippe. But the most serious breach of relations between the two resulted from her failure to approve of Balzac's adoration of Madame Hanska. While admitting the extreme beauty of the celebrated Daffinger portrait, she was jealous of his *Prédilecta.* When she saw the bound proofs of *La Femme supérieure* which he had intended for Madame Hanska, she felt that she was being neglected. In the end, he robbed his *Châtelaine* to the profit of his *cara sorella.* But when she became impatient at Balzac's prolonged stay at Wierzchownia, he resented it, explaining that marriage is like cream — a change of atmosphere would spoil it,— that bad marriages could be made with the utmost ease, but good ones required infinite precaution and scrupulous attention. He tried to make her see the advantage of this marriage, writing her:

> "Consider, dear Laura, none of us are as yet, so to speak, *arrived;* if, instead of being obliged to work in order to live, I had become the husband of one of the

cleverest, the best-born, and best-connected of women, who is also possessed of a solid though circumscribed fortune, in spite of the wish of the lady to live retired, to have no intercourse even with the family, I should still be in a position to be much better able to be of use to you all. I have the certainty of the warm kindness and lively interest which Madame Hanska takes in the dear children. Thus it is more than a duty in my mother, and all belonging to me, to do nothing to hinder me from the happy accomplishment of a union which *before all is my happiness.* Again, it must not be forgotten that this lady is illustrious, not only on account of her high descent, but for her great reputation for wit, beauty, and fortune (for she is credited with all the millions of her daughter); she is constantly receiving proposals of marriage from men of the highest rank and position. But she is something far better than rich and noble; she is exquisitely good, with the sweetness of an angel, and of an easy compatibility in daily life which every day surprises me more and more; she is, moreover, thoroughly pious. Seeing all these great advantages, the world treats my hopes with something of mocking incredulity, and my prospects of success are denied and derided on all sides. If we were all to live . . . under the same roof, I could conceive the difficulties raised by my mother about her dignity; but to keep on the terms which are due to a lady who brings with her (fortune apart) most precious social advantages, I think you need only confine yourself to giving her the impression that my relations are kind and affectionate amongst themselves, and kindly affectionate towards the man she loves. It is the only way to excite her interest and to preserve her influence, which will be enormous. You may all of you, in a great fit of independence, say you have no

need of any one, that you intend to succeed by your own exertions. But, between ourselves, the events of the last few years must have proved to you that nothing can be done without the help of others; and the social forces that we can least afford to dispense with are those of our own family. Come, Laura, it is something to be able, in Paris, to open one's *salon* and to assemble all the *élite* of society, presided over by a woman who is refined, polished, imposing as a queen, of illustrious descent, allied to the noblest families, witty, well-informed, and beautiful; there is here a power of social domination. To enter into any struggle whatever with a woman in whom so much influence centers is — I tell you this in confidence — an act of insanity. Let there be neither servility, nor sullen pride, nor susceptibility, nor too much compliance; nothing but good natural affection. This is the line of conduct prescribed by good sense towards such a woman." [21]

One can see how Madame Surville would resent such a letter, especially when she might have arranged another marriage, advantageous and sensible, for him. But poor Balzac, knowing her interest in his happiness, writes to her a joyful letter the day after his marriage: "As to Madame de Balzac, what more can I say about her? I may be envied for having won her: with the exception of her daughter, there is no woman in this land who can compare with her. She is indeed the diamond of Poland, the gem of this illustrious house of Rzewuski." [22] After explaining to her that this was a marriage of pure affection, as his wife had given her fortune to her

[21] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 357–360, March 22, 1849.
[22] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 393, March 15, 1850.

children and wished to live only for them and for him, Balzac tells his sister that he hoped to present Madame Honoré de Balzac to her soon, signing the letter, "Your brother Honoré at the summit of happiness."

A great attraction for Balzac in the home of Madame Surville were his two nieces, Sophie and Valentine, to whom he was devoted, and with whom he frequently spent his evenings. The story is told that one evening on entering his sister's home, he asked for paper and pencil, which were given him. After spending about an hour, not in making notes, as one might imagine, but in writing columns of figures and adding them, he discovered that he owed fifty-nine thousand francs, and exclaimed that his only recourse was to blow his brains out, or throw himself into the Seine! When questioned by his niece Sophie in tears as to whether he would not finish the novel he had begun for her, he declared that he was wrong in becoming so discouraged, to work for her would be a pleasure; he would no longer be depressed, but would finish her book, which would be a masterpiece, sell it for three thousand *écus,* pay all his creditors within two years, amass a dowry for her and become a peer of France! [23]

Balzac had forbidden his nieces to read his books, promising to write one especially for them. The book referred to here is *Ursule Mirouët* which he dedicated to Sophie as follows:

"To Mademoiselle Sophie Surville.

"It is a real pleasure, my dear niece, to dedicate to you a

[23] Eugene de Mirecourt, *Les Contemporains, Balzac,* pp. 51–56.

book of which the subject and the details have gained the approbation — so difficult to secure — of a young girl to whom the world is yet unknown, and who will make no compromise with the high principles derived from a pious education. You young girls are a public to be dreaded; you ought never to be permitted to read any books less pure than your own pure souls, and you are forbidden certain books, just as you are not allowed to see society as it really is. Is it not enough, then to make a writer proud, to know that he has satisfied you? Heaven grant that affection may not have misled you! Who can say? The future only, which you, I hope, will see, though he may not, who is your uncle

"BALZAC."

To Valentine Surville he dedicated *La Paix du Ménage*.

The novelist was interested in helping his sister find suitable husbands for her daughters. He and Sophie had a wager as to which — she or he — would marry first; so when Balzac finally reached his own long-sought goal, he did not forget to remind his niece that she owed him a wedding gift.

Sophie became an accomplished musician, having for her master Ambroise Thomas. Balzac spoke very lovingly of Valentine during her early childhood; but she was so attractive that he feared she would be spoiled. And spoiled she was, or perhaps naturally inclined to indolence, for he wrote her a few years later:

"I should be very glad to learn that Valentine studies as much as the young Countess, who, besides all her other studies, practices daily at her piano. The success of this education is owing to hard work, which Miss Valentine shuns a little too much. Now, I say to my dear niece

that to do nothing except what we feel inclined to do is the origin of all deterioration, especially in women. Rules obeyed and duties fulfilled have been the law of the young Countess from childhood, although she is an only child and a rich heiress. . . . Thus I beg Valentine not to exhibit a creole *nonchalance;* but to listen to the advice of her sister, to impose tasks on herself, and to do work of various sorts, without neglecting the ordinary and daily cares of the household, and, above all, constantly to withstand the inclination we all have, more or less, to give ourselves up to what we find pleasant; it is by this yielding to inclination that we deteriorate and fall into misfortune." [24]

While Balzac was living in Wierzchownia, he urged his nieces to write to him oftener, as the young Countess Anna took the greatest interest in their chatter; they were like two nightingales coming by post to enchant the Ukrainian solitude. He had portrayed them so well that all took an interest in them, and their letters were called for first whenever he received a package from Paris. He requested them to send him certain favorite recipes, and planned to have Sophie play with the young countess.

Sophie seemed to have some of the traits of her grandmother; for the novelist wrote his sister:

"Sophie has traced out a catechism of what she considers *my duties* towards you, just as last year my mother wrote me a catechism of my duties towards my nieces; it is a sort of cholera peculiar to our family, to lecture uncles both at home and abroad. I make fun of it, but all these little things are remarked upon, which I do not

[24] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 339, 341, November, 1848. Letter to Mlles. Sophie and Valentine Surville.

like; then these blank pages make me furious. I forgive Sophie on account of the *motif*, which is you, and for all she and Valentine have done for your *fête*. Ah! if my wishes are ever realized, how I shall enjoy introducing my dear nieces, both so unspoiled by the devil! I have sung their praises here. I have said Sophie is a great musician: I add, Valentine is a *man of letters*, and she is tired with writing three pages." [25]

If certain letters received by Balzac from his family irritated him, he perhaps unconsciously was making his sister jealous by continually extolling the young Countess Mniszech:

"She has a genius, as well as a love, for music; if she had not been an heiress, she would have been a great artiste. If she comes to Paris in eighteen months or two years, she will take lessons in thorough bass and composition. It is all she needs as regards music. She has (without exaggeration) hands the size of a child of eight years old. These minute, supple, white hands, three of which I could hold in mine, have an iron power of finger, in due proportion, like that of Liszt. The keys, not the fingers, bend; she can compass ten keys by the span and elasticity of her fingers; this phenomenon must be seen to be believed. Music, her mother, and her husband: these three words sum up her character. She is the Fenella of the fireside; the will-o'-wisp of our souls; our gaiety; the life of the house. When she is not here, the very walls are conscious of her absence — so much does she brighten them by her presence. She has never known misfortune; she knows nothing of annoyance; she is the idol of all who surround her, and she has the sensibility

[25] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, pp. 371, 372, October 20, 1849.

and goodness of an angel: in one word, she unites qualities which moralists consider incompatible; it is, however, only a self-evident fact to all who know her. She is evidently well informed, without pedantry; she has a delightful *naïveté;* and though long since married, she has still the gaiety of a child, loving laughter like a little girl, which does not prevent her from possessing a religious enthusiasm for great objects. Physically, she has a grace even more beautiful than beauty, which triumphs over a complexion still somewhat brown (she is hardly sixteen);[26] a nose well formed, but not striking, except in the profile; a charming figure, supple and *svelte;* feet and hands exquisitely formed, and wonderfully small, as I have just mentioned. All these advantages are, moreover, thrown into relief by a proud bearing, full of race, by an air of distinction and ease which all queens have not, and which is now quite lost in France, where everybody wishes to be equal. This exterior — this air of distinction — this look of a *grande dame,* is one of the most precious gifts which God — the God of women can bestow. The Countess Georges speaks four languages as if she were a native of each of the countries whose tongue she knows so thoroughly. She has a keenness of observation which astonishes me; nothing escapes her. She is besides extremely prudent; and entirely to be relied on in daily intercourse. There are no words to describe her, but *perle fine.* Her husband adores her; I adore her; two cousins on the point of *old-maidism* adore her — she will always be adored, as fresh reasons for loving her continually arise."[27]

[26] For the incorrectness of this statement, see the chapter on the Countess Mniszech.

[27] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 337–339, November, 1848. Letter to Mlles. Sophie and Valentine Surville.

Such adoration of Madame Hanska's daughter was enough to make Madame Surville jealous, especially when she was so despondent over her financial situation, but Balzac tried to cheer her thus: "You should be proud of your two children, they have written two charming letters, which have been much admired here. Two such daughters are the reward of your life; you can afford to accept many misfortunes." [28]

MADAME SALLAMBIER — MADAME DE MONTZAIGLE — MADAME DE BRUGNOLLE — MADAME DELANNOY — MADAME DE POMMEREUL — MADAME DE MARGONNE

"Ah we are fine specimens in this blessed family of ours! What a pity I can't put ourselves into novels." [29]

Another member of Balzac's family circle was his affectionate and amiable grandmother, whom he loved from

[28] *Ibid.,* v. 2, p. 381, November, 1849.

Sophie Surville, the older daughter, whose matrimonial possibilities were so much discussed, was finally unhappily married to M. Mallet. She was a good harpist, and taught the harp. She died without issue. Valentine was married, 1859, to M. Louis Duhamel, a lawyer. She had a good voice for singing, and literary talent; she took charge of having a part of Balzac's correspondence published. She had two children; a daughter who became Mme. Pierre Carrier-Belleuse, wife of an artist, and a son, *publiciste distingué.* Laurence de Balzac had two sons; the older, Alfred de Montzaigle, dissipated, a friend of Musset, died in 1852 without issue. The younger son, Alfonse, married Mlle. Caroline Jung; he died in 1868 at Strasbourg. Of their three children, only one, Paul de Montzaigle, lived. M. Surville-Duhamel, Mme. Pierre Carrier-Belleuse, and M. de Montzaigle are the only living relatives of Balzac. Mme. Belleuse and M. de Montzaigle have each a little daughter. *See* Le Docteur Cabanès, *Balzac ignoré,* p. 100, 101.

[29] *Œuvres de H. de Balzac,* v. 24, p. 28, letter to Madame Surville.

childhood. After her husband's death, Madame Sallambier lived with her daughter, Madame de Balzac. She seems to have had a kind disposition, and having the requisite means, she could indulge Honoré in various ways. When he was brought back from *collège* in wretched health, she condemned the schools for their neglect.

While studying at home, Balzac frequently spent his evenings playing whist or Boston with her. Through voluntary inattention or foolish plays, she allowed him to win money which he used to buy books. Throughout his life he loved these games in memory of her. She encouraged him in his writings, and when *L'Héritière de Birague* was sold for eight hundred francs, he was sure of the sale of the *first* copy, for she had promised to buy it. He was devoted to her, and when he had neglected writing to her for some time, he atoned by sending to her a most affectionate letter.

After the marriage of his sister Laure, Balzac kept her informed in detail concerning the family life. Of his grandmother, we find the following:

> " Grandmamma begs me to say all the pretty things she would write if that unfortunate malady did not rob her of all her faculties! Nevertheless she begins to think her head is better, and if the spring comes there is every reason to hope she will recover her wonted gaiety. . . . Grandmamma is suffering from a nervous attack; . . . Papa says that grandmamma is a clever actress who knows the value of a walk, of a glance, and how to fall gracefully into an easy chair." [30]

[30] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, pp. 163, 167, 178, 1822.

If Madame Sallambier with her nervous attacks annoyed Balzac in his youth, he spoke beautifully of her after her death, and referred to her as his "grandmother who loved him," or his "most excellent grandmother." In speaking of his grief over the death of Madame de Berny, he said that never, since the death of his grandmother, had he so deeply sounded the gulf of separation. One of his characteristics he inherited from his grandmother, that of keeping trivial things which had belonged to those he loved.

Not a great deal is said of Balzac's younger sister, Laurentia, but he has left this pen picture of her:

> "On the whole you know that Laurentia is as beautiful as a picture — that she has the prettiest of arms and hands, that her complexion is pale and lovely. In conversation people give her credit for plenty of sense, and find that it is all a natural sense, which is not yet developed. She has beautiful eyes, and though pale many men admire that. . . . You are not aware that Laurentia has taken a violent fancy to Augustus de L——. Say nothing that might lead her to suspect I have betrayed the secret, but I have all the trouble in the world to get it into her head that authors are the most villainous of matches (in respect of fortune, be it understood). Really Laurentia is quite romantic. How she would hate me if she knew with what irreverence I allude to her tender attachment." [31]

This attachment was evidently not very serious, for not long afterward Laurentia was married to Monsieur

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 167, 1821, 1822. Letter to Madame Surville.

de Montzaigle. His family had a title and stood well in the town, so Laurentia's parents were pleased with the marriage. This was a great event in the family, and Balzac describes to his married sister, Laure, the accompanying excitement in the home:

> "Grandmamma is in a great state of delight; papa is quite satisfied,— so am I, — so are you. As to mamma, recall the last days of your own *demoiselleric,* and you will have some idea of what Laurentia and I have to endure. Nature surrounds all roses with thorns: mamma follows nature." [32]

The happiness of poor Laurentia was of short duration. She died five years after her marriage, leaving two children. Her husband did not prove to be what the Balzac family had expected, and her children were left destitute for Madame de Balzac to care for. Balzac always spoke tenderly of her, and once in despair he exclaimed that at times he envied his poor sister Laurentia, who had been lying for many years in her coffin.

After Balzac's return from St. Petersburg, his letters were filled with allusions to Madame de Brugnolle, his housekeeper and financial counselor. He brought presents to various friends, and her he presented with a muff. Besides being very practical, economical and kind, she was a good manager for Balzac financially and strict with him regarding his diet; the *bonne montagnarde* did almost

[32] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 146, 1821. It was from the father of Laurentia's husband that M. and Madame de Berny bought their home in Villeparisis.

everything possible, from running his errands to making his home happy. He sent business letters under her name, and her fidelity and devotion are seen in her denying herself clothes in order to buy household necessities for him.

She served the novelist as a spy when he and Gavault disagreed. When Lirette visited Paris, she treated her very kindly and gave up her own room in order to arrange comfortable quarters for her. She had some relatives who had entered a convent, and she talked of ending her days in one, but Balzac begged her to keep house for him. He felt that she was born for that! Madame de Brugnolle was of much help to him in looking after Lirette's financial affairs, visiting her in the convent, and carrying messages to her from him. Many times she comforted him by promising to look out for his family, even consenting to go to Wierzchownia, if necessary, as Lirette's visit had helped her to realize as never before the angelic sweetness of his *Loup*.

In return for this devotion, he took her with him to Frankfort and to Bury to visit Madame de Bocarmé. He celebrated the birthday of the *montagnarde* in 1844, giving her some very attractive presents. Her economy and devotion seemed to increase with time, and enabled him to travel without any worry about his home. What must not have been the trial to him when this happy household came to be broken up later by her marriage! [33]

Madame Delannoy was an old family friend of the Balzacs. She aided Balzac in his financial troubles as

[33] For details, see M. F. Sandars, *H. de Balzac*, p. 230.

early in his career as 1826, and though he remained indebted to her for more than twenty years, he tried to repay her and was ever grateful to her, calling her his second mother. The following, written late in his career, reveals his general attitude towards her:

> "I have just written a long letter to Madame Delannoy, with whom I have settled my business; but this still leaves me with obligations of conscientiousness towards her, which my first book will acquit. No one could have behaved more like a mother, or been more adorable than she has been throughout all this business. She has been a mother, I will be a son." [34]

But if she remained one of his principal creditors, she received many literary proofs of his appreciation. As early as 1831 he dedicated to her a volume of his *Romans et Contes philosophiques,* but later he changed the title to *Études philosophiques,* and dedicated to her *La Recherche de L'Absolu:*

> "To Madame Josephine Delannoy, née Doumerg.
>
> "Madame, may God grant that this book have a longer life than mine! The gratitude which I have vowed to you, and which I hope will equal your almost maternal affection for me, would last beyond the limits prescribed for human feeling. This sublime privilege of prolonging the life in our hearts by the life of our works would be, if there were ever a certainty in this respect, a recompense for all the labor it costs those whose ambition is such. Yet again I say: May God grant it!
>
> "De Balzac."

[34] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 372, October 20, 1849. Letter to Madame Surville.

Balzac once thought of buying from Madame Delannoy a house that was left her by her friend, M. Ferraud, but which she could not keep. He felt that this would be advantageous to them both, but the plan was never carried out. Besides their financial and literary relations, their social relations were most cordial. He speaks of accompanying her and her daughter to the Italian opera twice during the absence of Madame Visconti.

In 1842, Balzac dedicated *La Maison-du-Chat-qui-pelote* to Mademoiselle Marie de Montheau, the daughter of Camille Delannoy, a friend of his sister, and the granddaughter of Madame Delannoy.

Another friend of Balzac's family was Madame de Pommereul. In the fall of 1828 after his serious financial loss, Balzac went to visit Baron and Madame de Pommereul in Brittany, where he obtained the material for *Les Chouans,* and became familiar with the château de Fougère. To please Madame de Pommereul, Balzac changed the name of his book from *Le Gars* to *Les Chouans,* after temporarily calling it *Le Dernier Chouan.*

She has given a beautiful pen portrait of the youthful Balzac in which she describes minutely his appearance, noting his beautiful hands, his intelligent forehead and his expressive golden brown eyes. There was something in his manner of speaking, in his gestures, in his general appearance, so much goodness, confidence, naïveté and frankness that it was impossible to know him without loving him, and his exuberant good nature was infectious. In spite of his misfortunes, he had not been in their company a quarter of an hour, and they had not

even shown him his room, before he had brought the general and herself to tears with laughter.

> "On some evenings he remained in the drawing-room in company with his hosts, and entered into controversies with Madame de Pommereul, who, being very pious herself, tried to persuade him to make a practice of religion; while Balzac, in return, when the discussion was exhausted, endeavored to teach her the rules of backgammon. But the one remained unconverted and the other never mastered the course of the noble game. Occasionally he helped to pass the time by inventing stories, which he told with all the vividness of which he was master." [35]

A few months after this prolonged visit, Balzac wrote to Général de Pommereul, expressing his deep appreciation of their hospitality, and in speaking of the book which he had just written, hoped that Madame de Pommereul would laugh at some details about the butter, the weddings, the stiles and the difficulties of going to the ball, etc., which he had inserted in his work,— if she could read it without falling asleep.

Balzac made perhaps his most prolonged visits in the home of another old family friend, M. de Margonne, who was living with his wife at Saché. He describes his life there thus:

> "Saché is the remains of a castle on the Indre, in one of the most delicious valleys of Touraine. The proprietor, a man of fifty-five, used to dandle me on his knee. He has a pious and intolerant wife, rather deformed and not

[35] A. Keim and L. Lumet, *Honoré de Balzac,* pp. 97, 98.

clever. I go there for him; and besides, I am free there. They accept me throughout the region as a child; I have no value whatever, and I am happy to be there, like a monk in a monastery. I always go there to meditate serious works. The sky there is so blue, the oaks so beautiful, the calm so vast! . . . Saché is six leagues from Tours. But not a woman, not a conversation possible!" [36]

Not only did Balzac visit them when he wished to compose a serious work, but he often went there to recuperate from overwork. He probably did not enjoy their company, as he spoke of "having" to dine with them and he is perhaps even chargeable with ingratitude when he speaks of their parsimony.

Like his own family, these old people were interested in seeing him married to a rich lady, but to no avail. In spite of his unkind remarks about them, Balzac appreciated their hospitality, and expressed it by dedicating to M. de Margonne *Une ténébreuse Affaire.*

MADAME CARRAUD — MADAME NIVET

"You are my public, you and a few other chosen souls, whom I wish to please; but yourself especially, whom I am proud to know, you whom I have never seen or listened to without gaining some benefit, you who have the courage to aid me in tearing up the evil weeds from my field, you who encourage me to perfect myself, you who resemble so much that angel to whom I owe everything; in short, you who are so good towards my ill-doings (*'mauvaisetés'*). I alone know how quickly I turn to you. I have recourse to your encouragements, when some

[36] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 21, March, 1833.

arrow has wounded me; it is the wood-pigeon regaining its nest. I bear you an affection which resembles no other, and which can have no rival, because it is alone of its kind. It is so bright and pleasant near you! From afar, I can tell you, without fear of being put to silence, all I think about your mind, about your life. No one can wish more earnestly that the road be smooth for you. I should like to send you all the flowers you love, as I often send above your head the most ardent prayers for your happiness." [37]

Balzac's friendship with Madame Zulma Carraud was not only of the purest and most beautiful nature, but it lasted longer than his friendship with any other woman, terminating only with his death. It was even more constant than that with his sister Laure, which was broken at times. Though Madame Surville states that it began in 1826, the following passage shows an earlier date: "I embrace you, and press you to a heart devoted to you. A friendship as true and tender now in 1838 as in 1819. Nineteen years!" [38] The first letter to her in either edition of his correspondence, however, is dated 1826.

Madame Carraud, as Zulma Tourangin, attended the same convent as Balzac's sister Laure. Her husband was a distinguished officer in the artillery and a man of learning, but absolutely lacking in ambition, preferring to direct the instruction of Saint-Cyr rather than to risk the chances of advancement presented in active service.

[37] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, p. 379, October 5, 1833. Letter to Madame Carraud.

[38] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, p. 73, January 1, 1838. Letter to Madame Carraud.

He became inspector of the gunpowder manufactory at Angoulême, and later retired to his home at Frapesle, near Issoudun. Though an excellent husband, his inactivity was a great annoyance to his wife. According to several Balzacian writers, Madame Carraud became the type of the *femme incomprise* for Balzac, but the present writer is inclined to agree with M. Serval [39] when he calls this judgment astonishing, since she was a woman who adored her husband and sons, was an author of some moral books for children, and nothing in her suggested either vagueness of soul or melancholy. Madame Carraud herself gives a glimpse of her married life in saying to Balzac that she and her husband are not sympathetic in everything, that being of different temperaments things appear differently to them, but that she knows happiness, and her life is not empty.

Often when sick, discouraged, overworked or pursued by his creditors, Balzac sought refuge in her home, and with a pure and disinterested maternal affection, she calmed him and inspired him with courage to continue the battle of life. It was indeed the maternal element that he needed and longed for, and Madame Carraud seems to have been a rare mother who really understood her child. He confided in her not only his financial worries, but also his love affairs, his aspirations in life, and his ideas of woman:

"I care more for the esteem of a few persons, amongst whom you are one of the first, both in friendship and in

[39] *La Rabouilleuse, Les Annales Romantiques,* pp. 360, 361, 1912–1913.

high intellect — one of the noblest souls I have ever known,— than I care for the esteem of the masses, for whom I have, in truth, a profound contempt. There are some vocations that must be obeyed, and something drags me irresistibly towards glory and power. It is not a happy life. There is in me a worship of woman, and a need of loving, which has never been completely satisfied. Despairing of ever being loved and understood as I desire, by the woman I have dreamt of (never having met her, except under one form — that of the heart), I have thrown myself into the tempestuous region of political passions and into the stormy and parching atmosphere of literary glory. . . . If ever I should find a wife and a fortune, I could resign myself very easily to domestic happiness; but where are these things to be found? Where is the family which would have faith in a literary fortune? It would drive me mad to owe my fortune to a woman, unless I loved her, or to owe it to flatteries; I am obliged, therefore, to remain isolated. In the midst of this desert, be assured that friendships such as yours, and the assurance of finding a shelter in a loving heart, are the best consolations I can have. . . . To dedicate myself to the happiness of a woman is my count and dream, but I do not believe marriage and love can exist in poverty. . . . I work too hard and I am too much worried with other things to be able to pay attention to those sorrows which sleep and make their nest in the heart. It may be that I shall come to the end of life, without having realized the hopes I entertained from them. . . . As regards my soul, I am profoundly sad. My work alone keeps me alive. Will there never then be a woman for me in this world? My fits of despondency and bodily weariness come upon me more frequently, and weigh upon me more heavily; to sink under this crushing load of fruitless labor,

without having near me the gentle caressing presence of woman, for whom I have worked so much!" [40]

Though Balzac and his mother were never congenial, he became very lonely after she left him in 1832. In the autumn of that year he had a break with the Duchesse de Castries, so he began the new year by summing up his trials and pouring forth his longings to Madame Carraud as he could do to no other woman, not even to his *Dilecta*. In response to this despondent epistle, she showed her broad sympathetic friendship by writing him a beautiful and comforting letter, in which she regretted not being able to live in Paris with him, so as to see him daily and give him the desired affection.

Not only through the hospitality of her home, but by sending various gifts, she ministered to Balzac's needs or caprices. To make his study more attractive, she indulged his craving for elegance and grace by surprising him with the present of a carpet and a lovely tea service. In thanking her for her thoughtfulness, he informed her that she had inspired some of the pages in the *Médicin de Campagne*.

Besides being so intimate a friend of Madame Carraud, the novelist was also a friend of M. Carraud, whom he called "Commandant Piston," and discussed his business plans with him before going to Corsica and Sardinia to investigate the silver mines. M. Carraud had a fine scientific mind; he approved of Balzac's scheme, and thought of going with him; his wife was astonished on hearing this, since he never left the house even to look

[40] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, pp. 256–258, June 1, 1832, pp. 351–356, May 26, 1833. Letters to Madame Carraud.

after his own estate. However, his natural habit asserted itself and he gave up the project.

Madame Carraud was much interested in politics, and many of Balzac's political ideas are set forth in his letters to her when he was a candidate for the post of deputy. She reproached him for a mobility of ideas, an inconstancy of resolution, and feared that the influence of the Duchesse de Castries had not been good for him. To this last accusation, he replied that she was unjust, and that he would never be sold to a party for a woman.

Another tie which united Balzac to Madame Carraud was her sympathy for his devotion to Madame de Berny, of whom she was not jealous. Both women were devoted to him, and were friendly towards each other, so much so that in December, 1833, she invited Balzac to bring Madame de Berny with him to spend several days in her home at Frapesle. This he especially appreciated, since neither his mother nor his sister approved of his relations with his *Dilecta*.

Madame Carraud occupied in Balzac's life a position rather between that of Madame de Berny and that of a sister. Indeed, he often referred to her as a sister, and she was generous minded enough to ask him not to write to her when she learned how unpleasant his mother and sister were in regard to his writing to his friends.

Seeing his devotion to her, one can understand why he begged her to spare him neither counsels, scoldings nor reproaches, for all were received kindly from her. One can perceive also the sincerity of the following expressions of friendship:

"You are right, friendship is not found ready made.

La Duchesse d' Abrantès

From a photo-engraving of a rare print

Thus every day mine for you increases; it has its root both in the past and in the present. . . . Though I do not write often, believe that my friendship does not sleep; the farther we advance in life, precious ties like our friendship only grow the closer. . . . I shall never let a year pass over without coming to inhabit my room at Frapesle. I am sorry for all your annoyances; I should like to know you are already at home, and believe me, I am not averse to an agricultural life, and even if you were in any sort of hell, I would go there to join you. . . . Dear friend, let me at least tell you now, in the fulness of my heart, that during this long and painful road four noble beings have faithfully held out their hands to me, encouraged me, loved me, and had compassion on me; and you are one of them, who have in my heart an inalienable privilege and priority over all other affections; every hour of my life upon which I look back is filled with precious memories of you. . . . You will always have the right to command me, and all that is in me is yours. When I have dreams of happiness, you always take part in them; and to be considered worthy of your esteem is to me a far higher prize than all the vanities the world can bestow. No, you can give me no amount of affection which I do not desire to return to you a thousand-fold. . . . There are a few persons whose approval I desire, and yours is one of those I hold most dear." [41]

Among those to whom Balzac could look for criticism, Madame Carraud had the high intelligence necessary for such a rôle; he felt that never was so wonderful an intellect as hers so entirely stifled, and that she would die

[41] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, p. 370, August 2, 1833. V. 2, p. 147, March, 1839. V. 1, pp. 388, 389, January 30, 1834. Letters to Madame Carraud.

in her corner unknown. (Perhaps this estimate of her caused various writers to think that Madame Carraud was Balzac's model for the *femme incomprise.*) Balzac not only had her serve him as a critic, but in 1836 he requested her to send him at once the names of various streets in Angoulême, and wished the " Commandant " to make him a rough plan of the place. This data he wanted for *Les deux Poètes,* the first part of *Les Illusions perdues.*

Like his family and some of his most intimate friends, she too interested herself in his future happiness, but when she wrote to him about marriage, he was furious for a long time. Concerning this question, Balzac informs her that a woman of thirty, possessing three or four hundred thousand francs, who could take a fancy to him, would find him willing to marry her, provided she were gentle, sweet-tempered and good-looking, although enormous sacrifices would be imposed on him by this course. Several months later, he writes her that if she can find a young girl twenty-two years of age, worth two hundred thousand francs or even one hundred thousand, she must think of him, provided the dowry can be applied to his business.

If the Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul is correct in his statement, Balzac showed Madame Carraud the first letter from *l'Étrangère,* in spite of his usual extreme prudence and absolute silence in such matters. She answered it, so another explanation of Balzac's various handwritings might be given. At least, Madame Carraud's seal was used.

In later years, Madame Carraud met with financial

reverses. The following letter, which is the last to her on record, shows not only what she had been to Balzac in his life struggle, but his deep appreciation and gratitude:

"We are such old friends, you must not hear from any one else the news of the happy ending of this grand and beautiful soul-drama which has been going on for sixteen years. Three days ago I married the only woman I have ever loved, whom I love more than ever, and whom I shall love to my life's end. I believe this is the reward God has kept in store for me through so many years of labor, of difficulties endured and surmounted. I had neither a happy youth nor a blooming spring; I shall have the most brilliant summer and the sweetest of all autumns. Perhaps, from this point of view, my most happy marriage will seem to you like a personal consolation, showing as it does that Providence keeps treasures in store to bestow on those who endure to the end. . . . Your letter has gained for you the sincerest of friends in the person of my wife, from whom I have had no secrets for a long time past, and she has known you by all the instances of your greatness of soul, which I have told her, also by my gratitude for your treasures of hospitality towards me. I have described you so well, and your letter has so completed your portrait, that now you are felt to be a very old friend. Also, with the same impulse, with one voice, and with one and the same feeling in our hearts, we offer you a pleasant little room in our house in Paris, in order that you may come there absolutely as if it were your own house. And what shall I say to you? You are the only creature to whom we could make this offer, and you must accept it or you would deserve to be unfortunate, for

you must remember that I used to go to your house, with the sacred unscrupulousness of friendship, when you were in prosperity, and when I was struggling against all the winds of heaven, and overtaken by the high tides of the equinox, drowned in debts. I have it now in my power to make the sweet and tender reprisals of gratitude . . . You will have some days' happiness every three months: come more frequently if you will; but you are to come, that is settled. I did this in the old times. At St. Cyr, at Angoulême, at Frapesle, I renewed my life for the struggle; there I drew fresh strength, there I learned to see all that was wanting in myself; there I obtained that for which I was thirsty. You will learn for yourself all that you have unconsciously been to me, to me a toiler who was misunderstood, overwhelmed for so long under misery, both physical and moral. Ah! I do not forget your motherly goodness, your divine sympathy for those who suffer. . . . Well, then as soon as you wish to come to Paris, you will come without even letting us know. You will come to the Rue Fortunêe exactly as to your own house, absolutely as I used to go to Frapesle. I claim this as my right. I recall to your mind what you said to me at Angoulême, when broken down after writing *Louis Lambert,* ill, and as you know, fearing lest I should go mad. I spoke of the neglect to which these unhappy ones are abandoned. 'If you were to go mad, I would take care of you.' Those words, your look, and your expression have never been forgotten. All this is still living in me now, as in the month of July 1832. It is in virtue of that word that I claim your promise to-day, for I have almost gone mad with happiness. . . . When I have been questioned here about my friendships, you have been named the first. I have described that fireside always burning, which is called Zulma, and you have two sincere

woman-friends (which is an achievement), the Countess Mniszech and my wife." [42]

His devotion is again seen in the beautiful words with which he dedicates to her in 1838 *La Maison Nucingen:*

"To Madame Zulma Carraud.

"To whom, madame, but to you should I inscribe this work, to you whose lofty and candid intellect is a treasury to your friends, to you who are to me not only an entire public, but the most indulgent of sisters? Will you deign to accept it as a token of a friendship of which I am proud? You, and some few souls as noble as your own, will grasp my thought in reading *la Maison Nucingen* appended to *César Birotteau.* Is there not a whole social contrast between the two stories?

"De Balzac."

While hiding from his creditors, Balzac took refuge with Madame Carraud at Issoudun, where he assumed the name of Madame Dubois to receive his mail. Here he met some people whose names he made immortal by describing them in his *Ménage de Garçon,* called later *La Rabouilleuse.* The priest Badinot introduced him to *La Cognette,* the landlady to whom the vineyard peasant sold his wine. La Cognette, some of whose relatives are still living, plays a minor rôle in the *Comédie humaine.* Her real name was Madame Houssard; her husband, whom Balzac incorrectly called "Père Cognet," kept a lit-

[42] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 394–399, March 17, 1850. Balzac is not exaggerating about the free use he made of her home, for besides going there for rest, he worked there, and two of his works, *La Grenadière* and *La Femme abandonnée,* were signed at Angoulême.

tle cabaret in the rue du Bouriau. "Mère Cognette," who lost her husband about 1835, opened a little café at Issoudun during the first years of her widowhood. Balzac was an intermittent and impecunious client of hers; he would enter her shop, quaff a cup of coffee, execrable to the palate of a connoisseur like him, and "chat a bit" with the good old woman who probably unconsciously furnished him with curious material.

The coffee drunk, the chat over, Balzac would strike his pockets, and declaring they were empty, would exclaim: "Upon my word, Mère Cognette, I have forgotten my purse, but the next time I'll pay for this with the rest!" This habit gave "Mère Cognette" an extremely mediocre estimate of the novelist, and she retained a very bad impression of him. Upon learning that he had, as she expressed it, "put me in one of his books," she conceived a violent resentment which ended only with her death (1855). "The brigand," she exclaimed, "he would have done better to pay me what he owes me!"

Another poor old woman, playing a far more important rôle in Balzac's work, lived at Issoudun and was called "La Rabouilleuse." For a long time, she had been the servant and mistress of a physician in the town. This wretched creature had an end different to the one Balzac gave his Rabouilleuse, but just as miserable, for having grown old, sick, despoiled and without means, she did not have the patience to wait until death sought her, but ended her miserable existence by throwing herself into a well.

The doctor, it seems, at his death had left her a little

home and some money, but his heirs had succeeded in robbing her of it entirely.— Perhaps this story is the origin of the contest of Dr. Rouget's heirs with his mistress.

This Rabouilleuse had a daughter who inherited her name, there being nothing else to inherit; she was a dish washer at the Hôtel de la Cloche, where Balzac often dined while at Issoudun. Can it be that he saw her there and learned from her the story of her mother?

Balzac was acquainted also with Madame Carraud's sister, Madame Philippe Nivet. M. Nivet was an important merchant of Limoges, living in a pretty, historical home there. It was in this home that Balzac visited early in his literary career, going there partly in order to visit these friends, partly to see Limoges, and partly to examine the scene in which he was going to place one of his most beautiful novels, *Le Curé de Village*. While crossing a square under the conduct of the young M. Nivet, Balzac perceived at the corner of the rue de la Vieille-Poste and the rue de la Cité an old house, on the ground-floor of which was the shop of a dealer in old iron. With the clearness of vision peculiar to him, he decided that this would be a suitable setting for the work of fiction he had already outlined in his mind. It is here that are unfolded the first scenes of *Le Curé de Village*, while on one of the banks of the Vienne is committed the crime which forms the basis of the story.[43]

[43] For further details of the sources of the novels mentioned above, see Jules Claretie, *Balzac à Issoudun*, les *Annales romantiques*, v. 5, pp. 66–70, 1908–1909.— Maurice Serval, *La Rabouilleuse, op. cit.*, pp. 356, 357, 1912–1913.— Fray-Fournier, *Balzac à Limoges*, p. 8.— Séché et Bertaut, *Balzac*, pp. 96, 97.

## CHAPTER III

## LITERARY FRIENDS

MADAME GAY.— MADAME HAMELIN.— MADAME DE GIRARDIN.— MADAME DESBORDES-VALMORE. — MADAME DORVAL.

"O matre pulchra filia pulchrior!"[1]

Though Balzac did not go out in "society" a great deal, he was fortunate in associating with the best literary women of his time, and in knowing the charming Madame Sophie Gay, whose salon he frequented, and her three daughters. Elisa, the eldest of these, was married to Count O'Donnel. Delphine was married June 1, 1831, to Émile de Girardin, and Isaure, to Théodore Garre, son of Madame Sophie Gail, an intimate friend of Madame Gay. These two women were known as "Sophie la belle" and "Sophie la laide" or "Sophie de la parole" and "Sophie de la musique." Together they composed an *opéra-comique* which had some success. In 1814 Madame Gay wrote *Anatole,* an interesting novel which Napoleon is said to have read the last night he passed at Fontainebleau before taking pathetic farewell of his guard. A few years before this, she wrote another novel which met with much success, *Léonine de Monbreuse,* a study of the society and customs of the *Directoire* and of the Empire.

[1] Horace, *Carmina,* I, 16, 1.

Madame Gay had made a literary center of her drawing-room in the rue Gaillon where she had grouped around her twice a week not only many of the literary and artistic celebrities of the epoch, but also her acquaintances who had occupied political situations under the Empire. Madame Gay, who had made her début under the *Directoire,* had been rather prominent under the Empire, and under the Restoration took delight in condemning the government of the Bourbons. Introduced into this company, though yet unknown to fame, Balzac forcibly impressed all those who met him, and while his physique was far from charming, the intelligence of his eyes revealed his superiority. Familiar and even hilarious, he enjoyed Madame Gay's salon especially, for here he experienced entire liberty, feeling no restraint whatever. At her receptions as in other salons of Paris, his toilet, neglected at times to the point of slovenliness, yet always displayed some distinguishing peculiarity.

Having acquired some reputation, the young novelist started to carry about with him the enormous and now celebrated cane, the first of a series of magnificent eccentricities. A quaint carriage, a groom whom he called Anchise, marvelous dinners, thirty-one waistcoats bought in one month, with the intention of bringing this number to three hundred and sixty-five, were only a few of the number of bizarre things which astonished for a moment his feminine friends, and which he laughingly called *réclame.* Like many writers of this epoch, Balzac was not polished in the art of conversing. His conversation was but little more than an amusing monologue, bright and at times noisy, but uniquely filled with himself,

and that which concerned him personally. The good, like the evil, was so grossly exaggerated that both lost all appearance of truth. As time went on, his financial embarrassments continually growing and his hopes of relieving them increasing in the same proportion, his future millions and his present debts were the subject of all his discourses.

Madame Gay was by no means universally beloved. In her sharp and disagreeable voice she said much good of herself and much evil of others. She had a mania for titles and was ever ready to mention some count, baron or marquis. In her drawing-room, Balzac found a direct contrast to the Royalist salon of the beautiful Duchesse de Castries which he frequented. In both salons, he met a society entirely unfamiliar to him, and acquainted himself sufficiently with the conventions of these two spheres to make use of them in his novels.

The *Physiologie du Mariage,* published anonymously in December, 1829, gave rise to a great deal of discussion. According to Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, two women well advanced in years, Madame Sophie Gay and Madame Hamelin, are supposed to have inspired the work, and even to have dictated some of its anecdotes least flattering to their sex. This Madame Hamelin, born in Guadeloupe about 1776, was the marvel of the *Directoire,* and several times was sent on secret missions by Napoleon. The rôle she played under the *Directoire,* the *Consulat* and the Empire is not quite clear, but she was a confidential friend of Châteaubriand, lived in the noted house called the *Madeleine,* near the forest of Fontainebleau, and wrote about it as did Madame de Sévigné about *Les Rochers.* While

living there, she received her Bonapartist friends as well as her Legitimist friends. Having lived in a society where life means enjoyment, she had many anecdotes to relate. She was a fine equestrienne, a most beautiful dancer, apparently naturally graceful, and bore the sobriquet of *la jolie laide.* Her marriage to the banker, M. Hamelin, together with her accomplishments, secured her a place in the society of the *Directoire.* Balzac, in a letter to Madame Hanska, refers to her as *une vieille célébrité,* and states that she wept over the letter of Madame de Mortsauf to Félix in *Le Lys dans la Vallée.* It is interesting to note that he later built his famous house and breathed his last in the rue Fortunée to which Madame Hamelin gave her Christian name, since it was cut through her husband's property, the former Beaujon Park, and that it became in 1851 the rue Balzac.

Delphine Gay, the beautiful and charming daughter of Madame Sophie Gay, was called "the tenth muse" by her friends, who admired the sonorous original verses which she recited as a young girl in her mother's salon. She became, in June, 1831, the wife of Émile de Girardin, the founder of the *Presse.* Possessing in her youth, a *bellezza folgorante,* Madame de Girardin was then in all the splendor of her beauty; her magnificent features, which might have been too pronounced for a young girl, were admirably suited to the woman and harmonized beautifully with her tall and statuesque figure. Sometimes, in the poems of her youth, she spoke as an authority on the subject of "the happiness of being beautiful." It was not coquetry with her, it was the sentiment of har-

mony; her beautiful soul was happy in dwelling in a beautiful body.

She held receptions for her friends after the opera, and Balzac was one of the frequenters of her attractive salon. Of her literary friends she was especially proud. According to Théophile Gautier, this was her coquetry, her luxury. If in some salon, some one — as was not unusual at that time — attacked one of her friends, with what eloquent anger did she defend them! What keen repartees, what incisive sarcasm! On these occasions, her beauty glowed and became illuminated with a divine radiance; she was magnificent; one might have thought Apollo was preparing to flay Marsyas!

> "Madame de Girardin professed for Balzac a lively admiration to which he was sensible, and for which he showed his gratitude by frequent visits; a costly return for him who was, with good right, so avaricious of his time and of his working hours. Never did woman possess to so high a degree as Delphine,— we were allowed to call her by this familiar name among ourselves — the gift of drawing out the wit of her guests. With her, we always found ourselves in poetical raptures, and each left her salon amazed at himself. There was no flint so rough that she could not cause it to emit one spark; and with Balzac, as you may well believe, there was no need of trying to strike fire; he flashed and kindled at once." [2]

Balzac was interested in the occult sciences — in chiromancy and cartomancy. He had been told of a sibyl

[2] Théophile Gautier, *Life Portraits, Balzac,* p. 218.

even more astonishing than Mademoiselle Lenormand, and he resolved that Madame de Girardin, Méry and Théophile Gautier should drive with him to the abode of the pythoness at Auteuil. The address given them was incorrect, only a family of honest citizens living there, and the old mother became angry at being taken for a sorceress. They had to make an ignominious retreat, but Balzac insisted that this really was the place and muttered maledictions on the old woman. Madame de Girardin pretended that Balzac had invented all this for the sake of a carriage drive to Auteuil, and to procure agreeable traveling companions. But if disappointed on this occasion, Balzac was more successful at another time, when with Madame de Girardin he visited the "magnetizer," M. Dupotet, rue du Bac.

Besides enjoying for a long time the "happiness of being beautiful," Delphine also enjoyed almost exclusively, in her set, that of being good. In this respect, she was superior to her mother who for the sake of a witticism, never hesitated to offend another. She had but few enemies, and, wishing to have none, tried to win over those who were inimical towards her. For twenty-five years she played the diplomat among all the rivals in talent and in glory who frequented her salon in the rue Laffitte or in the Champs-Élysées. She prevented Victor Hugo from breaking with Lamartine; she remained the friend of Balzac when he quarreled with her autocratic husband. She encouraged Gautier, she consoled George Sand; she had a charming word for every one; and always and everywhere prevailed her merry laughter — even when she longed to

weep. But her cheery laugh was not her highest endowment; her greatest gift was in making others laugh.[3]

Balzac had a sincere affection for Delphine Gay and enjoyed her salon. In his letters to her he often addressed her as *Cara* and *Ma chère écolière.* Her poetry having been converted into prose by her prosaic husband, she submitted her writings to Balzac as to an enlightened master. He asked *Delphine Divine* to write a preface for his *Études de Femmes,* but she declined, saying that an habitué of the opera who could so transform himself as to paint the admirable Abbé Birotteau, could certainly surpass her in writing *une préface de femme.* She did, however, write the sonnet on the *Marguerite* which Lucien de Rubempré displayed as one of the samples of his volume of verses to the publisher Dauriat; also *Le Chardon.* Balzac made use of this poem, however, only in the original edition of his work; it was replaced in the *Comédie humaine* by another sonnet, written probably by Lassailly. Madame de Girardin brings her master before the public by mentioning his name in her *Marguerite, ou deux Amours,* where a personage in the book tells about Balzac's return from Austria and his inability to speak German when paying the coachman.

It was at the home of Madame de Girardin that Lamartine met Balzac for the first time, June, 1839. He asked her to invite Balzac to dinner with him that he might thank him, as he was just recovering from an illness during which he had " simply lived " on the novels of the *Comédie humaine.* The invitation she wrote Balzac runs as fol-

[3] For a beautiful picture of Madame de Girardin, see Léon Séché, *Delphine Gay.*

lows: "M. de Lamartine is to dine with me Sunday, and wishes absolutely to dine with you. Nothing would give him greater pleasure. Come then and be obliging. He has a sore leg, you have a sore foot, we will take care of both of you, we will give you some cushions and foot-stools. Come, come! A thousand affectionate greetings." [4] And Lamartine has left this appreciation of her and her friendship for Balzac:

> "Madame Émile de Girardin, daughter of Madame Gay who had reared her to succeed her on two thrones, the one of beauty, the other of wit, had inherited, moreover, that kindness which inspires love with admiration. These three gifts, beauty, wit, kindness, had made her the queen of the century. One could admire her more or less as a poetess, but, if one knew her thoroughly, it was impossible not to love her as a woman. She had some passion, but no hatred. Her thunderbolts were only electricity; her imprecations against the enemies of her husband were only anger; that passed with the storm. It was always beautiful in her soul, her days of hatred had no morrow. . . . She knew my desire to know Balzac. She loved him, as I was disposed to love him myself. . . . She felt herself in unison with him, whether through gaiety with his joviality, through seriousness with his sadness, or through imagination with his talent. He regarded her also as a rare creature, near whom he could forget all the discomforts of his miserable existence." [5]

A few years after their meeting, Lamartine inquired Balzac's address of Madame de Girardin, as she was one

[4] Léon Séché, *Delphine Gay*, p. 207.
[5] A. de Lamartine, *Balzac et ses Œuvres*, pp. 9, 10.

of the few people who knew where he was hiding on account of his debts. Balzac was appreciative of the many courtesies extended to him by Madame de Girardin and was delighted to have her received by his friends, among whom was the Duchesse de Castries.

Madame de Girardin made constant efforts to keep the peace between Balzac and her husband, the potentate of the *Presse.* Balzac had known Émile de Girardin since 1829, having been introduced to him by Levavasseur, who had just published his *Physiologie du Mariage.* Later Balzac took his *Verdugo* to M. de Girardin which appeared in *La Mode* in which Madame de Girardin and her mother were collaborating; but these two men were too domineering and too violent to have amicable business dealings with each other for any length of time. Balzac, while being *un bourreau d'argent,* would have thought himself dishonored in subordinating his art to questions of commercialism; M. de Girardin only esteemed literature in so far as it was a profitable business. They quarreled often, and each time Madame de Girardin defended Balzac.

Their first serious controversy was in 1834. Balzac was no longer writing for *La Mode;* he took the liberty of reproducing elsewhere some of his articles which he had given to this paper; M. de Girardin insisted that they were his property and that his consent should have been asked. Madame de Girardin naturally knew of the quarrel and had a difficult rôle to play. If she condemned Balzac, she would be lacking in friendship; if she agreed with him, she would be both disrespectful to her husband and unjust. Like the clever woman that she was, she said both

George Sand

From a portrait by Delacroix

were wrong, and when she thought their anger had passed, she wrote a charming letter to Balzac urging him to come dine with her, since he owed her this much because he had refused her a short time before. She begged that they might become good friends again and enjoy the beautiful days laughing together. He must come to dinner the next Sunday, Easter Sunday, for she was expecting two guests from Normandy who had most thrilling adventures to relate, and they would be delighted to meet him. Again, her sister, Madame O'Donnel, was ill, but would get up to see him, for she felt that the mere sight of him would cure her.

Anybody but Balzac would have accepted this invitation of Madame de Girardin's, were it only to show his gratitude for what she had done for him; but Balzac was so fiery and so mortified by the letter of M. de Girardin that, without taking time to reflect, he wrote to Madame Hanska:

> "I have said adieu to that mole-hill of Gay, Émile de Girardin and Company. I seized the first opportunity, and it was so favorable that I broke off, point-blank. A disagreeable affair came near following; but my susceptibility as man of the pen was calmed by one of my college friends, ex-captain in the ex-Royal Guard, who advised me. It all ended with a piquant speech replying to a jest." [6]

However, in answering the invitation of Madame de Girardin, Balzac wrote most courteously expressing his regrets at Madame O'Donnel's illness and pleading work as

[6] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 144, March 30, 1834.

his excuse for not accepting. This did not prevent the ardent peacemaker from making another attempt. Taking advantage of her husband's absence a few weeks later, she invited Balzac to lunch with Madame O'Donnel and herself. But time had not yet done its work, so Balzac declined, saying that it would be illogical for him to accept when M. de Girardin was not at home, since he did not go there when he was present. The following excerpts from his letters, declining her various invitations, show that Balzac regarded her as his friend:

> "The regret I experience is caused quite as much by the blue eyes and blond hair of a lady who I believe to be my friend — and whom I would gladly have for mine — as by those black eyes which you recall to my remembrance, and which had made an impression on me. But indeed I can not come. . . . Your *salon* was almost the only one where I found myself on a footing of friendship. You will hardly perceive my absence; and I remain alone. I thank you with sincere and affectionate feeling, for your kind persistence. I believe you to be actuated by a good motive; and you will always find in me something of devotion towards you in all that personally concerns yourself."[7]

Her attempts to restore the friendship were futile, owing to the obstinacy of the quarrel, but she eventually succeeded by means of her novel, *La Canne de Monsieur de Balzac*. In describing this cane as a sort of club made of

[7] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, pp. 395, 399, 1834. The blue eyes refer to Madame de Girardin, and the black eyes to her widowed sister, Madame O'Donnel.

turquoises, gold and marvelous chasings, Madame de Girardin incidentally compliments Balzac by making Tancrède observe that Balzac's large, black eyes are more brilliant than these gems, and wonder how so intellectual a man can carry so ugly a cane.

This famous cane belongs to-day to Madame la Baronne de Fontenay, daughter of Doctor Nacquart. In October, 1850, Madame Honoré de Balzac wrote a letter to Doctor Nacquart, Balzac's much loved physician, asking him to accept, as a souvenir of his illustrious friend, this cane which had created such a sensation,— the entire mystery of which consisted in a small chain which she had worn as a young girl, and which had been used in making the knob. There has been much discussion as to its actual appearance. He describes it to Madame Hanska (March 30, 1835), as bubbling with turquoise on a chased gold knob. The description of M. Werdet can not be relied on, for he states that Gosselin brought him the cane in October, 1836, and that Balzac conceived the idea of it while at a banquet in prison, but, as has been shown, the cane was in existence as early as March, 1835, and Madame de Girardin's book appeared in May, 1836. As to the description of the cane given by Paul Lacroix, the Princess Radziwill states that the cane owned by him is the one that Madame Hanska gave Balzac, and which he afterwards discarded for the gaudier one he had ordered for himself. This first cane was left by him to his nephew, Edouard Lacroix. Several years later (1845), Balzac had Froment Meurice make a cane *aux singes* for the Count George de Mniszech, future son-

in-law of Madame Hanska, so the various canes existing in connection with Balzac may help to explain the varying descriptions.[8]

Balzac could not remain indifferent after Madame de Girardin had thus brought his celebrated cane into prominence. He was absent from Paris when the novel appeared, and scarcely had he returned when he wrote her (May 27, 1836), cordially thanking her as an old friend. He also after this made peace with M. de Girardin. But one difficulty was scarcely settled before another began, and the ever faithful Delphine was continually occupied in trying to establish peace. Her numerous letters to Balzac are filled with such expressions as: "Come to-morrow, come to dinner. Come, we can not get along without you! Come, Paris is an awful bore. We need you to laugh. Come dine with us, come! Come!!! Now come have dinner with us to-morrow or day after to-morrow, to-day, or even yesterday, every day!! A thousand greetings from Émile." [9] Thus with her hospitality and merry disposition, she bridged many a break between her husband and Balzac.

Finally, not knowing what to do, she decided not to let Balzac mention the latest quarrel. When he referred to it, she replied: "Oh! no, I beg you, speak to Théophile Gautier. It is not for nothing that I have given him charge of the *feuilleton* of the *Presse*. That no longer concerns me, make arrangements with him." Then she

[8] For further comments on this much discussed cane, see Léon Séché, les *Annales romantiques*, pp. 168, 169, 1910–1911. Jules Claretie, *ibid.*, p. 223, 1908–1909. Paul Lacroix le *Livre*, pp. 279, 280, 1882. J. W. Sherer, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, pp. 600–607, June, 1884.

[9] S. de Lovenjoul, *La Genèse d'un roman de Balzac*, pp. 107–122.

counseled her husband to have Théophile Gautier direct this part of the *Presse* in order not to contend with Balzac, but the novelist was so unreasonable that M. de Girardin had to intervene. "My beautiful Queen," once wrote Théophile to Delphine, "if this continues, rather than be caught between the anvil Émile and the hammer Balzac, I shall return my apron to you. I prefer planting cabbage or raking the walks of your garden." To this, Madame de Girardin replied: "I have a gardener with whom I am very well satisfied, thank you; continue to maintain order *du palais.*" [10]

The relations between M. de Girardin and the novelist became so strained that Balzac visited Madame de Girardin only when he knew he would not encounter her husband. M. de Girardin retired early in the evening; his wife received her literary friends after the theater or opera. At this hour, Balzac was sure not to meet her husband, whose non-appearance permitted the intimate friends to discuss literature at their ease.

Although Madame de Girardin was married to a publicist, she did not like journalists, so she conceived the fancy of writing a satirical comedy, *L'École des Journalistes,* in which she painted the journalists in rather unflattering colors. The work was received by the committee of the Théâtre-Français, but the censors stopped the performance. Balzac was angry at this interdiction, for he too disliked journalists, but Madame de Girardin took the censorship philosophically. In her salon she read *L'École des Journalistes* to her literary friends; there Balzac figured prominently, dressed for this occasion in his blue suit with

[10] Léon Séché, *Delphine Gay,* pp. 223, 224.

engraved gold buttons, making his coarse Rabelaisian laughter heard throughout the whole reading.

Balzac's fame increased with the years, but he still regarded the friendship of Madame de Girardin among those he most prized, and in 1842 he dedicated to her *Albert Savarus*. When she moved into the little Greek temple in the Champs-Élysées, she was nearer Balzac, who was living at that time in the rue Basse at Passy, so their relations became more intimate. Yet when, after his return from St. Petersburg where he had visited Madame Hanska in 1843, the *Presse* published the scandalous story about his connection with the Italian forger, he vowed he would never see again the scorpions Gay and Girardin.

Madame de Girardin regretted Balzac's not being a member of the Academy. In 1845, a chair being vacant, she tried to secure it for him. Although her salon was not an "academic" one, she had several friends who were members of the Academy and she exerted her influence with them in his behalf; when, after all her solicitude, he failed to gain a place among the "forty immortals," she had bitter words for their poor judgment, Balzac at that time being at the zenith of his reputation. Some time before this, too, she promised to write a *feuilleton* on the great conversationalists of the day, maintaining that Balzac was one of the most brilliant; and she was thoughtful in inserting in her *feuilleton* a few gracious words about his recent illness and recovery.

Balzac confided to Madame de Girardin his all absorbing passion for Madame Hanska. She knew of the secret visit of the "Countess" to Paris and of his four days' visit with her in Wiesbaden. She knew all the noble

qualities and countless charms of the adored "Countess," but never having seen her, she felt that Madame Hanska did not fully reciprocate the passionate love of her *moujik.* Becoming ironical, she called Balzac a *Vetturino per amore,* and told him she had heard that Madame Hanska was, to be sure, exceedingly flattered by his homage and made him follow wherever she went — but only through vanity and pride,— that she was indeed very happy in having for *patito* a man of genius, but that her social position was too high to permit his aspiring to any other title.

When the *Avant-Propos* of the *Comédie humaine* was reprinted in the *Presse,* October 25, 1846, it was preceded by a very flattering introduction written by Madame de Girardin. She continued to entertain the novelist, sending him many amusing invitations. In spite of the "Potentate of the *Presse,*" her friendship with Balzac lasted until 1847, when she had to give him up.

The ever faithful Delphine knew of Balzac's financial embarrassment and persuaded her husband to postpone pressing him for the debts which he had partially paid before setting out for the Ukraine. The Revolution of February seriously affected Balzac's financial matters. After the death of Madame O'Donnel, in 1841, Madame de Girardin's friendship lost a part of its charm for Balzac and the rest of it vanished in these troubles. Since the greater part of the last few years of Balzac's life was spent in the Ukraine, she saw but little of him, but she hoped for his return with his long sought bride to the home he had so lovingly prepared for her in the rue Fortunée.

Whether Balzac was fickle in his nature, or whether he

was trying to convince Madame Hanska that she was the only woman for whom he cared, one finds, throughout his letters to her, various comments on Madame de Girardin, some favorable, some otherwise. He admired her beauty very much, and was saddened when, at the height of her splendor, she was stricken with smallpox. He was grateful to her for the service she rendered him in arranging for the first presentation of his play *Vautrin;* throughout the misfortune attending this production she proved to be a true friend. Although he accepted her hospitality frequently, at times being invited to meet foreigners, among them the German Mlle. de Hahn, enjoying himself immensely, he regretted the time he sacrificed in this manner, and when he quarreled with her husband, he expressed his happiness in severing his relations with them. While a charming hostess at a small dinner party, she became, Balzac felt, a less agreeable one at a large reception, her talents not being sufficient to conceal her *bourgeois* origin.

Madame de Girardin was in the country near Paris when she heard the sad news of the death of the author of the *Comédie humaine.* The shock was so great that she fainted, and, on regaining consciousness, wept bitterly over the premature death of her friend. A few years before her own death, in 1855, Madame de Girardin was greatly depressed by painful disappointments. The death of Balzac may be numbered as one of the sad events which discouraged, in the decline of life, the heart and the hope of this noble woman.

Madame Desbordes-Valmore was another literary woman whom Balzac met in the salon of Madame Sophie

Gay, where she and Delphine recited poetry. Losing her mother at an early age under especially sad circumstances and finding her family destitute, after long hesitation, she resigned herself to the stage. Though very delicate, by dint of studious nights, close economy and many privations, she prepared herself for this work. At this time she contracted a *habit* of suffering which passed into her life. She played at the *Opéra Comique* and recited well, but did not sing. At the age of twenty her private griefs compelled her to give up singing, for the sound of her own voice made her weep. So from music she turned to poetry, and her first volume of poems appeared in 1818. She began her theatrical career in Lille, played at the Odéon, Paris, and in Brussels, where she was married in 1817 to M. Valmore, who was playing in the same theater. Though she went to Lyons, to Italy, and to the Antilles, she made her home in Paris, wandering from quarter to quarter.

Of her three children, Hippolyte, Undine (whose real name was Hyacinthe) and Inès, the two daughters passed away before her. Her husband was honor and probity itself, and suffered only as a man can, from compulsory inaction. He asked but for honest employment and the privilege to work. She was so sensitive and felt so unworthy that she did not call for her pension after it was secured for her by her friends, Madame Récamier and M. de Latouche. A letter written by her to Antoine de Latour (October 15, 1836) gives a general idea of her life: "I do not know how I have slipped through so many shocks,— and yet I live. My fragile existence slipped sorrowfully into this world amid the pealing bells of a

revolution, into whose whirlpool I was soon to be involved. I was born at the churchyard gate, in the shadow of a church whose saints were soon to be desecrated." [11]

She was indeed a " tender and impassioned poetess, . . . one who united an exquisite moral sensibility to a thrilling gift of song. . . . Her verses were doubtless the expression of her life; in them she is reflected in hues both warm and bright; they ring with her cries of love and grief. . . . Hers was the most courageous, tender and compassionate of souls." [12]

A letter written to Madame Duchambye (December 7, 1841), shows what part she played in Balzac's literary career:

> " You know, my other self, that even ants are of some use. And so it was I who suggested, not M. de Balzac's piece, but the notion of writing it and the distribution of the parts, and then the idea of Mme. Dorval, whom I love for her talent, but especially for her misfortunes, and because she is dear to me. I have made such a moan, that I have obtained the sympathy and assistance of — whom do you guess? — poor Thisbé, who spends her life in the service of the *littérateur.* She talked and insinuated and insisted, until at last he came to me and said, 'So it shall be! My mind is made up! Mme. Dorval shall have a superb part!' And how he laughed! . . . Keep this a profound secret. Never betray either me or poor Thisbé, particularly our influence on behalf of Mme. Dorval." [13]

[11] Sainte-Beuve, *Madame Desbordes-Valmore,* p. 81.

[12] Sainte-Beuve, *Madame Desbordes-Valmore,* pp. 2, 177.

[13] Sainte-Beuve, *op. cit.,* p. 135. The play referred to is doubtless *Les Ressources de Quinola.*

His friendship for her is seen in a letter written to her in 1840:

"Dear Nightingale,— Two letters have arrived, too brief by two whole pages, but perfumed with poetry, breathing the heaven whence they come, so that (a thing which rarely happens with me) I remained in a reverie with the letters in my hand, making a poem all alone to myself, saying, 'She has then retained a recollection of the heart in which she awoke an echo, she and all her poetry of every kind.' We are natives of the same country, madame, the country of tears and poverty. We are as much neighbors and fellow-citizens as prose and poetry can be in France; but I draw near to you by the feeling with which I admire you, and which made me stand for an hour of ten minutes before your picture in the Salon. Adieu! My letter will not tell you all my thoughts; but find by intuition all the friendship which I have entrusted to it, and all the treasures which I would send you if I had them at my disposal." [14]

Soon after Balzac met Madame Hanska, he reserved for her the original of an epistle from Madame Desbordes-Valmore which he regarded as a masterpiece. Balzac's friendship for the poetess, which began so early in his literary life, was a permanent one. Just before leaving for his prolonged visit in Russia, he wrote her a most complimentary letter in which he expressed his hopes of being of service to M. Valmore at the Comédie Française, and bade her good-by, wishing her and her family much happiness.

[14] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, p. 167, 1840.

Madame Desbordes-Valmore was one of the three women whom Balzac used as a model in portraying some of the traits of his noted character, Cousin Bette. He made Douai, her native place, the setting of *La Recherche de l'Absolu,* and dedicated to her in 1845 one of his early stories, *Jésus-Christ en Flandres:*

"To Marceline Desbordes-Valmore,

"To you, daughter of Flanders, who are one of its modern glories, I dedicate this naïve tradition of old Flanders.

"De Balzac."

Though Balzac's first play, and first attempt in literature, *Cromwell,* was a complete failure, this did not deter him from longing to become a successful playwright. After having established himself as a novelist, he turned again to this field of literature. Having written several plays, he was acquainted, naturally, with the leading actresses of his day; among these was Madame Dorval, whom he liked. He purposed giving her the main rôle in *Les Ressources de Quinola,* but when he assembled the artists to hear his play, he had not finished it, and improvised the fifth act so badly that Madame Dorval left the room, refusing to accept her part.

Again, he wished her to take the leading rôle in *La Marâtre* (as the play was called after she had objected to the name *Gertrude, Tragédie bourgeoise*). To their disappointment, however, the theater director, Hostein, gave the heroine's part to Madame Lacressonière; the tragedy was produced in 1848. The following year, while in

Russia, Balzac sketched another play in which Madame Dorval was to have the leading rôle, but she died a few weeks later.

Mademoiselle Georges was asked to take the rôle of Brancadori in *Les Ressources de Quinola,* presented for the first time on March 19, 1842, at the Odéon.

Balzac was acquainted with Mademoiselle Mars also, and was careful to preserve her autograph in order to send it to his " Polar Star," when the actress wrote to him about her rôle in *La grande Mademoiselle.*

### LA DUCHESSE D'ABRANTÈS

" She has ended like the Empire." [15]

Another of Balzac's literary friends was Madame Laure Junot, the Duchesse d'Abrantès. She was an intimate friend of Madame de Girardin and it was in the salon of the latter's mother, Madame Sophie Gay, that Balzac met her.

The Duchesse d'Abrantès, widow of Maréchal Junot, had enjoyed under the Empire all the splendors of official life. Her salon had been one of the most attractive of her epoch. Being in reduced circumstances after the downfall of the Empire and having four children (Joséphine, Constance, Napoléon and Alfred) to support, her life was a constant struggle to obtain a fortune and a position for her children. But as she had no financial ability, and had acquired very extravagant habits, the money she was constantly seeking no sooner entered her hands than it vanished. Wishing to renounce none of her former

[15] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 487, August 8, 1838.

luxuries, she insisted upon keeping her salon as in former days, trying to conceal her poverty by her gaiety; but it was a sorrowful case of *la misère dorée*.

Feeling that luxury was as indispensable to her as bread, and finding her financial embarrassment on the increase, she decided to support herself by means of her pen. She might well have recalled the wise words of Madame de Tencin when she warned Marmontel to beware of depending on the pen, since nothing is more casual. The man who makes shoes is sure of his pay; the man who writes a book or a play is never sure of anything.[16]

Though the Générale Junot belonged to a society far different from Balzac's, they had many things in common which brought him frequently to her salon. Balzac realized the necessity of frequenting the salons, saying that the first requisite of a novelist is to be well-bred; he must move in society as much as possible and converse with the aristocratic *monde*. The kitchen, the green-room, can be imagined, but not the salon; it is necessary to go there in order to know how to speak and act there.

Though Balzac visited various salons, he presented a different appearance in the drawing-room of Madame d'Abrantès. The glories of the Empire overexcited him to the point of giving to his relations with the Duchesse a vivacity akin to passion. The first evening, he exclaimed: "This woman has seen Napoleon as a child, she has seen him as a young man, still unknown, she has seen him occupied with the ordinary things of life, then she has seen him develop, rise and cover the world with his name! She is for me a saint come to sit beside me, after having lived in

[16] Marmontel, *Mémoires*, v. 1, book 4, p. 245.

heaven with God!" This love of Balzac for Napoleon underwent more than one variation, but at this time he had erected in his home in the rue de Cassini a little altar surmounted by a statue of Napoleon, with this inscription: "What he began with the sword, I shall achieve with the pen." [17]

When Balzac first met the Duchesse d'Abrantès, she was about forty years of age. It is probably she whom he describes thus, under the name of Madame d'Aiglemont, in *La Femme de trente Ans:*

"Madame d'Aiglemont's dress harmonized with the thought that dominated her person. Her hair was gathered up into a tall coronet of broad plaits, without ornament of any kind, for she seemed to have bidden farewell forever to elaborate toilets. Nor were any of the small arts of coquetry which spoil so many women to be detected in her. Only her bodice, modest though it was, did not altogether conceal the dainty grace of her figure. Then, too, the luxury of her long gown consisted in an extremely distinguished cut; and if it is permissible to look for expression in the arrangement of materials, surely the numerous straight folds of her dress invested her with a great dignity. Moreover, there may have been some lingering trace of the indelible feminine foible in the minute care bestowed upon her hand and foot; yet, if she allowed them to be seen with some pleasure, it would have tasked the utmost malice of a rival to discover any affectation in her gestures, so natural did they seem, so much a part of old childish habit, that her careless grace absolves this vestige of vanity. All these little characteristics, the nameless trifles which combine to make up

[17] Madame Ancelot, *Les Salons de Paris,* pp. 95, 96.

the sum of a woman's beauty or ugliness, her charm or lack of charm, can not be indicated, especially when the soul is the bond of all the details and imprints on them a delightful unity. Her manner was in perfect accord with her figure and her dress. Only to certain women at a certain age is it given to put language into their attitude. Is it sorrow, is it happiness that gives to the woman of thirty, to the happy or unhappy woman, the secret of this eloquence of carriage? This will always be an enigma which each interprets by the aid of his hopes, desires, or theories. The way in which she leaned both elbows on the arm of her chair, the toying of her interclasped fingers, the curve of her throat, the freedom of her languid but lithesome body which reclined in graceful exhaustion, the unconstraint of her limbs, the carelessness of her pose, the utter lassitude of her movements, all revealed a woman without interest in life. . . ."

Balzac's parents having moved from Villeparisis to Versailles, he had an excellent opportunity of seeing the Duchess while visiting them, as she was living at that time in the Grande-Rue de Montreuil No. 65, in a pavilion which she called her *ermitage*. In *La Femme de trente Ans,* Balzac has described her retreat as a country house between the church and the barrier of Montreuil, on the road which leads to the Avenue de Saint-Cloud. This house, built originally for the short-lived loves of some great lord, was situated so that the owner could enjoy all the pleasures of solitude with the city almost at his gates.

Soon after their meeting,[18] a sympathetic friendship

[18] For a difference of opinion as to dates, see *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 48, Gabriel Ferry, *Balzac et ses Amies,* p. 47, Joseph Turquan, *La Générale Junot, Duchesse d'Abrantès,* p. 342, 378.

was formed between the two writers; they had the same literary aspirations, the same love for work, the same love of luxury and extravagant tastes, the same struggles with poverty and the same trials and disappointments.

Since Balzac was attracted to beautiful names as well as to beautiful women, that of the Duchesse d'Abrantès appealed to him, independently of the wealth of history it recalled. He was happy to make the acquaintance of one who could give him precise information of the details of the *Directoire* and of the Empire, an instruction begun by the *commère Gay*. Thus the Duchesse d'Abrantès was to exercise over him, though in a less degree, the same influence for the comprehension of the Imperial world that Madam de Berny did for the Royalist world, just as the Duchesse de Castries later was to initiate him into the society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Madame d'Abrantès, pleased as she was to meet literary people, welcomed most cordially the young author who came to her seeking stories of the Corsican. Owing to financial difficulties she was leading a rather retired and melancholy life, and the brilliant and colorful language of Balzac, fifteen years her junior, aroused her heart from its torpor, and her friendship for him took a peculiar tinge of sentiment which she allowed to increase. It had been many years since she had been thus moved, and this new feeling, which came to her as she saw the twilight of her days approaching, was for her a love that meant youth and life itself.

Hence her words pierced the very soul of Balzac and kindled an enthusiasm which made her appear to him greater than she really was; she literally dazzled and sub-

jugated him. Her gaiety and animation in relating incidents of the Imperial court, and her autumnal sunshine, its rays still glowing with warmth as well as brightness, compelled Balzac to perceive for the second time in his life the insatiability of the woman who has passed her first youth — the woman of thirty, or the tender woman of forty. The fact is, however, not that Balzac created *la femme sensible de quarante ans,* as is stated by Philarète Chasles, so much as that two women of forty, Madame de Berny and Madame d'Abrantès, created him.

This affection savored of vanity in both; she was proud that at her years she could inspire love in a man so much younger than herself, while Balzac, whose affection was more of the head than of the heart, was flattered — it must be confessed — in having made the conquest of a duchess. Concealing her wrinkles and troubles under an adorable smile, no woman was better adapted than she to understand "the man who bathed in a marble tub, had no chairs on which to sit or to seat his friends, and who built at Meudon a very beautiful house without a flight of stairs." [19]

But the love on Balzac's side must have been rather fleeting, for many years later, on March 17, 1850, he wrote to his old friend, Madame Carraud, announcing his marriage with Madame Hanska: "Three days ago I married the only woman I have ever loved." Evidently he had forgotten, among others, the poor Duchess, who had passed away twelve years before.

But how could Balzac remain long her ardent lover,

[19] Philarète Chasles, *Mémoires,* v. 1, p. 307. This house, *Les Jardies,* was at Ville-d'Avray and not at Meudon.

when Madame de Berny, of whom Madame d'Abrantès was jealous, felt that he was leaving her for a duchess? And how could he remain more than a friend to Madame Junot, when the beautiful Duchesse de Castries was for a short time complete mistress of his heart,[20] and was in her turn to be replaced by Madame Hanska? The Duchess could probably understand his inconstancy, for she not only knew of his attachment to Madame de Castries but he wrote her on his return from his first visit to Madame Hanska at Neufchâtel, describing the journey and saying that the Val de Travers seemed made for two lovers.

Knowing Balzac's complicated life, one can understand how, having gone to Corsica in quest of his Eldorado just before the poor Duchess breathed her last, he could write to Madame Hanska on his return to Paris: "The newspapers have told you of the deplorable end of the poor Duchesse d'Abrantès. She has ended like the Empire. Some day I will explain her to you,— some good evening at Wierzschownia."

Balzac wished to keep his visits to Madame d'Abrantès a secret from his sister, Madame Surville, and some obscurity and a "mysterious pavilion" is connected with their manner of communication. For a while she visited him frequently in his den. He enjoyed her society, and though oppressed by work, was quite ready to fix upon an evening when they could be alone.

It was not without pain that she saw his affection for

[20] It is an interesting coincidence that the Duchess whose star was waning had been in love with the fascinating Austrian ambassador, Comte de Metternich, and the Duchess who was to take her place, was just recovering from an amorous disappointment in connection with his son when she met Balzac.

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her becoming less ardent while hers remained fervent. She wrote him tender letters inviting him to dine with her, or to meet some of her friends, assuring him that in her *ermitage* he might feel perfectly at home, and that she regarded him as one of the most excellent friends Heaven had preserved for her.

"Heaven grant that you are telling me the truth, and that indeed I may always be for you a good and sincere friend. . . . My dear Honoré, every one tells me that you no longer care for me. . . . I say that they lie. . . . You are not only my friend, but my sincere and good friend. I have kept for you a profound affection, and this affection is of a nature that does not change. . . . Here is *Catherine,* here is my first work. I am sending it to you, and it is the heart of a friend that offers it to you. May it be the heart of a friend that receives it! . . . My soul is oppressed on account of this, but it is false, I hope." [21]

Balzac continued to visit her occasionally, and there exists a curious specimen of his handwriting written (October, 1835) in the album of her daughter, Madame Aubert. He sympathized with the unfortunate Duchess who, raised to so high a rank, had fallen so low, and tried to cheer her in his letters:

"You say you are ill and suffering, and without any hope that finer weather will do you any good. Remember that for the soul there arises every day a fresh springtime and a beautiful fresh morning. Your past life has

[21] *Collection de M. le Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul,* quoted by Joseph Turquan, *op. cit.,* pp. 392, 393, 412, 413.

no words to express it in any language, but it is scarcely a recollection, and you cannot judge what your future life will be by that which is past. How many have begun to lead a fresh, lovely, and peaceful life at a much more advanced age than yours! We exist only in our souls. You cannot be sure that your soul has come to its highest development, nor whether you receive the breath of life through all your pores, nor whether as yet you see with all your eyes." [22]

Being quite a linguist, Madame d'Abrantès began her literary career by translations from the Portuguese, Spanish and Italian, and by writing novels, in the construction of which, Balzac advised her. As she had no business ability, he was of great assistance to her also in arranging for the publication of her work:

"In the name of yourself, I entreat you, do not enter into any engagement with anybody whatsoever; do not make any promise, and say that you have entrusted your business to me on account of my knowledge of business matters of this kind, and of my unalterable attachment to yourself personally. I believe I have found what I may call *living money,* seventy thousand healthy francs, and some people, who will jump out of themselves, to dispose in a short time of 'three thousand d'Abrantès,' as they say in their slang. Besides, I see daylight for a third and larger edition. If Mamifère (Mame) does not behave well, say to him, 'My dear sir, M. de Balzac has my business in his charge still, as he had on the day he presented you to me; you must feel he has the priority over the preference you ask for.' This done, wait for me. I shall make you laugh when I tell you what I have concocted.

[22] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, pp. 234, 235. 1831.

If Everat appears again, tell him that I have been your attorney for a long time past in these affairs, when they are worth the trouble; one or two volumes are nothing. But twelve or thirteen thousand francs, oh! oh! ah! ah! things must not be endangered. Only manœuver cleverly, and, with that *finesse* which distinguishes Madame the Ambassadress, endeavor to find out from Mame how many volumes he still has on hand, and see if he will be able to oppose the new edition by slackness of sale or excessive price.

"Your entirely devoted." [23]

(H. DE BALZAC.)

Such assistance was naturally much appreciated by a woman so utterly ignorant of business matters. But if Balzac aided the Duchess, he caused her publishers much annoyance, and more than once he received a sharp letter rebuking him for interfering with the affairs of Madame d'Abrantès.

It was doubtless due to the suggestion of Balzac that Madame d'Abrantès wrote her *Mémoires*. He was so thrilled by her vivid accounts of recent history, that he was seized with the idea that she had it in her power to do for a brilliant epoch what Madame Roland attempted to do for one of grief and glory. He felt that she had witnessed such an extraordinary multiplicity of scenes, had known a remarkable number of heroic figures and great characters, and that nature had endowed her with unusual gifts.

A few years before her death, *La Femme abandonnée* was dedicated:

[23] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, pp. 408, 409. 1834.

"To her Grace the Duchesse d'Abrantès,
"from her devoted servant,
"Honoré de Balzac."

If such was the rôle played by Balzac in the life of Madame d'Abrantès, how is she reflected in the *Comédie humaine?*

It is a well known fact that Balzac not only borrowed names from living people, but that he portrayed the features, incidents and peculiarities of those with whom he was closely associated. In the *Avant-propos de la Comédie humaine,* he writes: "In composing types by putting together traits of homogeneous natures, I might perhaps attain to the writing of that history forgotten by so many historians,— the history of manners."

In fact, he too might have said: "I take my property wherever I find it;" accordingly one would naturally look for characteristics of Madame d'Abrantès in his earlier works.

According to M. Joseph Turquain, Mademoiselle des Touches in *Béatrix,* generally understood to be George Sand, has also some of the characteristics of Madame d'Abrantès. Balzac describes Mademoiselle des Touches as being past forty and *un peu homme,* which reminds one that the Countess Dash describes Madame d'Abrantès as being rather masculine, with an *organe de rogome,* and a virago when past forty. Calyste became enamored of Béatrix after having loved Mademoiselle des Touches, while Balzac became infatuated with Madame de Castries after having been in love with Madame d'Abrantès, in each case, the blonde after the brunette.

Mademoiselle Josephine, the elder and beloved daughter of Madame d'Abrantès, entered the Convent of the Sisters of Charity of Saint-Vincent de Paul, contrary to the desires of her mother. In writing to the Duchess (1831), Balzac asks that Sister Josephine may not forget him in her prayers, for he is remembering her in his books. Balzac may have had her in mind a few years later when he said of Mademoiselle de Mortsauf in *Le Lys dans la Vallée:* "The girl's clear sight had, though only of late, seen to the bottom of her mother's heart, . . ." for Mademoiselle Josephine entered the convent for various reasons, one being in order to relieve the financial strain and make marriage possible for her younger sister, another perhaps being to atone for the secret she probably suspected in the heart of her mother, and which she felt was not complimentary to the memory of her father. And also, in *La Recherche de l'Absolu:* "There comes a moment, in the inner life of families, when the children become, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the judges of their parents."

In writing the introduction to the *Physiologie du Mariage,* Balzac states that here he is merely the humble secretary of two women. He is doubtless referring to Madame d'Abrantès as one of the two when he says:

> "Some days later the author found himself in the company of two ladies. The first had been one of the most humane and most intellectual women of the court of Napoleon. Having attained a high social position, the Restoration surprised her and caused her downfall; she had become a hermit. The other, young, beautiful, was playing at that time, in Paris, the rôle of a fashionable

woman. They were friends, for the one being forty years of age, and the other twenty-two, their aspirations rarely caused their vanity to appear on the same scene. 'Have you noticed, my dear, that in general women love only fools?'—'*What are you saying, Duchess?*'" [24]

In *La Femme abandonnée,* Madame de Beauséant resembles the Duchess as portrayed in this description:

"All the courage of her house seemed to gleam from the great lady's brilliant eyes, such courage as women use to repel audacity or scorn, for they were full of tenderness and gentleness. The outline of that little head, . . . the delicate, fine features, the subtle curves of the lips, the mobile face itself, wore an expression of delicate discretion, a faint semblance of irony suggestive of craft and insolence. It would have been difficult to refuse forgiveness to those two feminine failings in her in thinking of her misfortunes, of the passion that had almost cost her her life. Was it not an imposing spectacle (still further magnified by reflection) to see in that vast, silent salon this woman, separated from the entire world, who for three years had lived in the depths of a little valley, far from the city, alone with her memories of a brilliant, happy, ardent youth, once so filled with fêtes and constant homage, now given over to the horrors of nothingness? The smile of this woman proclaimed a high sense of her own value."

In the postscript to the *Physiologie du Mariage,* Balzac

[24] M. Turquan states that Madame Hamelin is one of these women and that the Duchesse d'Abrantès is incontestably the other. For a different opinion, see the chapter on Madame Gay. The italics are the present writer's.

mentions a gesture of one of these "intellectual" women, who interrupts herself to touch one of her nostrils with the forefinger of her right hand in a coquettish manner. In *La Femme abandonnée,* Madame de Beauséant has the same gesture. Another gesture of Madame de Beauséant in *La Femme abandonnée* indicates that Balzac had in mind the Duchesse d'Abrantès: ". . . Then, with her other hand, she made a gesture as if to pull the bell-rope. The charming gesture, the gracious threat, no doubt, called up some sad thought, some memory of her happy life, of the time when she could be wholly charming and graceful, when the gladness of her heart justified every caprice, and gave one more charm to her slightest movement. The lines of her forehead gathered between her brows, and the expression of her face grew dark in the soft candle-light. . . ." The Duchesse d'Abrantès had on two occasions rung to dismiss her lovers, M. de Montrond and General Sebastiani. Balzac had doubtless heard her relate these incidents, and they are contained in the *Journal intime,* which she gave him.[25]

In *La Femme abandonnée,* Balzac describes Madame de Beauséant as having taken refuge in Normandy, "after a notoriety which women for the most part envy and condemn, especially when youth and beauty in some way excuse the transgression." Can it be that the novelist thus condones the fault of this noted character because he wishes to pardon the *liaison* of Madame d'Abrantès with the Comte de Metternich?

[25] Madame d'Abrantès presented several objects of a literary nature to Balzac, among others, a book of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a few leaves of which he presented to Madame Hanska for her collection of autographs.

Is it then because so many traces of Madame d'Abrantès are found in *La Femme abandonnée,* and allusions are made to minute episodes known to them alone, that he dedicated it to her?

Was Balzac thinking of the Duchesse d'Abrantès when, in *Un Grand Homme de Province à Paris,* speaking of Lucien Chardon, who had just arrived in Paris at the beginning of the Restoration, he writes: "He met several of those women who will be spoken of in the history of the nineteenth century, whose wit, beauty and loves will be none the less celebrated than those of queens in times past."

In depicting Maxime de Trailles, the novelist perhaps had in mind M. de Montrond, about whom the Duchess had told him. Again, many characteristics of her son, Napoleon d'Abrantès, are seen in La Palférine, one of the characters of the *Comédie humaine.*

If Madame de Berny is Madame de Mortsauf in *Le Lys dans la Vallée,* Madame d'Abrantès has some traits of Lady Dudley, of whom Madame de Mortsauf was jealous. The Duchess gave him encouragement and confidence, and Balzac might have been thinking of her when he made the beautiful Lady Dudley say: "I alone have divined all that you were worth." After Balzac's affection for Madame de Berny was rekindled, Madame d'Abrantès, who was jealous of her, had a falling out with him.

It was probably Madame Junot who related to Balzac the story of a necklace of Madame Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angely, to which allusion is made in his *Physiologie du Mariage,* also an anecdote which is told in the same

book about General Rapp, who had been an intimate friend of General Junot. At this time Balzac knew few women of the Empire; he did not frequent the home of the Countess Merlin until later. While Madame d'Abrantès was not a duchess by birth, Madame Gay was not a duchess at all, and Madame Hamelin still further removed from nobility.

It is doubtless to Madame d'Abrantès that he owes the subject of *El Verdugo,* which he places in the period of the war with Spain; to her also was due the information about the capture of Senator Clément de Ris, from which he writes *Une ténébreuse Affaire.*

M. René Martineau, in proving that Balzac got his ideas for *Une ténébreuse Affaire* from Madame d'Abrantès, states that this is all the more remarkable, since the personage of the senator is the only one which Balzac has kept just as he was, without changing his physiognomy in the novel. The senator was still living at the time Madame d'Abrantès wrote her account of the affair, his death not having occurred until 1827. In her *Mémoires,* Madame d'Abrantès refers frequently to the kindness of the great Emperor, and it is doubtless to please her that Balzac, in the *dénouement* of *Une ténébreuse Affaire,* has Napoleon pardon two out of the three condemned persons. Although the novelist may have heard of this affair during his sojourns in Touraine, it is evident that the origin of the lawsuit and the causes of the conduct of Fouché were revealed to him by Madame Junot.

Who better than Madame d'Abrantès could have given Balzac the background for the scene of Corsican hatred so vividly portrayed in *La Vendetta?* Balzac's preference

for General Junot is noticeable when he wishes to mention some hero of the army of the Republic or of the Empire; the Duc and Duchesse d'Abrantès are included among the noted lodgers in *Autre Etude de Femme.* It was doubtless to please the Duchess that Balzac mentions also the Comte de Narbonne (*Le Médecin de Campagne*).

Impregnating his mind with the details of the Napoleonic reign, so vividly portrayed in *Le Colonel Chabert, Le Médecin de Campagne, La Femme de trente Ans* and others, she was probably the direct author of several observations regarding Napoleon that impress one as being strikingly true. Balzac read to her his stories of the Empire, and though she rarely wept, she melted into tears at the disaster of the Bérésina, in the life of Napoleon related by a soldier in a barn.

The Générale Junot had a great influence over Balzac; she enlightened him also about women, painting them not as they should be, but as they are.[26]

During the last years of the life of Madame d'Abrantès, a somber tint spread over her gatherings, which gradually became less numerous. Her financial condition excited little sympathy, and her friends became estranged from her as the result of her poverty. Under her gaiety and in spite of her courage, this distress became more apparent with time. Her health became impaired; yet she continued to write when unable to sit up, so great was her

[26] M. Joseph Turquan, *op. cit.,* states that when the correspondence of Madame d'Abrantès and Balzac, to which he has had access, is published, one will be able to determine exactly the rôle she has played in the formation of the talent of the writer, and in the development of his character. His admirable work has been very helpful in the preparation of this study of Madame d'Abrantès.

need for money. From her high rank she had fallen to the depth of misery! When evicted from her poverty-stricken home by the bailiff, her maid at first conveyed her to a hospital in the rue de Chaillot, but there payment was demanded in advance. That being impossible, the poor Duchess, ill and abandoned by all her friends, was again cast into the street. Finally, a more charitable hospital in the rue des Batailles took her in. Thus, by ironical fate, the widow of the great *Batailleur de Junot,* who had done little else during the past fifteen years than battle for life, was destined to end her days in the rue des Batailles.

LA PRINCESSE BELGIOJOSO.— MADAME MARBOUTY.—LA COMTESSE D'AGOULT.— GEORGE SAND.

"The Princess (Belgiojoso) is a woman much apart from other women, not very attractive, twenty-nine years old, pale, black hair, Italian-white complexion, thin, and playing the vampire. She has the good fortune to displease me, though she is clever; but she poses too much. I saw her first five years ago at Gérard's; she came from Switzerland, where she had taken refuge." [27]

The Princess Belgiojoso had her early education entrusted to men of broad learning whose political views were opposed to Austria. She was reared in Milan in the home of her young step-father, who had been connected with the *Conciliatore.* His home was the rendezvous of the artistic and literary celebrities of the day; but beneath the surface lay conspiracy. At the age of sixteen she was

[27] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 457, January 22, 1838.

married to her fellow townsman, the rich, handsome, pleasure-loving, musical Prince Belgiojoso, but the union was an unhappy one. Extremely patriotic, she plunged into conspiracy.

In 1831, she went to Paris, opened a salon and mingled in politics, meeting the great men of the age, many of whom fell in love with her. Her salon was filled with people famous for wit, learning and beauty, equaling that of Madame Récamier; Balzac was among the number. If Madame de Girardin was the Tenth Muse, the Princesse Belgiojoso was the Romantic Muse. She was almost elected president of *Les Académies de Femmes en France* under the faction led by George Sand, the rival party being led by Madame de Girardin.

Again becoming involved in Italian politics, and exiled from her home and adopted country, she went to the Orient with her daughter Maria, partly supporting herself with her pen. After her departure, the finding of the corpse of Stelzi in her cupboard caused her to be compared to the Spanish Juana Loca, but she was only eccentric. While in the Orient she was stabbed and almost lost her life. In 1853 she returned to France, then to Milan where she maintained a salon, but she deteriorated physically and mentally.

For almost half a century her name was familiar not alone in Italian political and patriotic circles, but throughout intellectual Europe. The personality of this strange woman was veiled in a haze of mystery, and a halo of martyrdom hung over her head. Notwithstanding her eccentricities and exaggerations, she wielded an intel-

lectual fascination in her time, and her exalted social position, her beauty, and her independence of character gave to her a place of conspicuous prominence.

As to whether Balzac always sustained an indifferent attitude towards the Princesse Belgiojoso there is some question, but he always expressed a feeling of nonchalance in writing about her to Madame Hanska. He regarded her as a courtesan, a beautiful *Impéria,* but of the extreme blue-stocking type. She was superficial in her criticism, and received numbers of *criticons* who could not write. She wrote him at the request of the editor asking him to contribute a story for the *Démocratie Pacifique.*

Balzac visited her frequently, calling her the Princesse *Bellejoyeuse,* and she rendered him many services, but he probably guarded against too great an intimacy, having witnessed the fate of Alfred de Musset. He was, however, greatly impressed by her beauty, and in the much discussed letter to his sister Laure he speaks of Madame Hanska as a masterpiece of beauty who could be compared only to the Princesse *Bellejoyeuse,* only infinitely more beautiful. Some years later, however, this beauty had changed for him into an ugliness that was even repulsive.

It amused the novelist very much to have people think that he had dedicated to the Princesse Belgiojoso *Modeste Mignon,* a work written in part by Madame Hanska, and dedicated to her. In the first edition this book was dedicated to a foreign lady, but seeing the false impression made he dedicated it, in its second edition to a Polish lady. He did, however, dedicate *Gaudissart II* to:

Madame la Princesse de Belgiojoso, née Trivulce.

Balzac found much rest and recuperation in travel, and in going to Turin, in 1836, instead of traveling alone, he was accompanied by a most charming lady, Madame Caroline Marbouty. She had literary pretentions and some talent, writing under the pseudonym of *Claire Brune.* Her work consisted of a small volume of poetry and several novels. She was much pleased at being taken frequently for George Sand, whom she resembled very much; and like her, she dressed as a man. Balzac took much pleasure in intriguing every one regarding his charming young page, whom he introduced in aristocratic Italian society; but to no one did he disclose the real name or sex of his traveling companion.

On his return from Turin he wrote to Comte Frédéric Sclopis de Salerano explaining that his traveling companion was by no means the person whom he supposed. Knowing his chivalry, Balzac confided to the Count that it was a charming, clever, virtuous woman, who never having had the opportunity of breathing the Italian air and being able to escape the ennui of housekeeping for a few weeks, had relied upon his honor. She knew whom the novelist loved, and found in that the greatest of guarantees. For the first and only time in her life she amused herself by playing a masculine rôle, and on her return home had resumed her feminine duties.

During this journey Madame Marbouty was known as *Marcel,* this being the name of the devoted servant of Raoul de Nangis in Meyerbeer's masterpiece, *Les Huguenots,* which had been given for the first time on February 29, 1836. The two travelers had a delightful but very

fatiguing journey, for there were so many things to see that they even took time from their sleep to enjoy the beauties of Italy. In writing to Madame Hanska of this trip, he spoke of having for companion a friend of Madame Carraud and Jules Sandeau.

Madame Marbouty was also a friend of Madame Carraud's sister, Madame Nivet, so that when Balzac visited Limoges he probably called on his former traveling companion.

When the second volume of the *Comédie humaine* was published (1842), Balzac remembered this episode in his life and dedicated *La Grenadière* to his traveling companion:

> "To Caroline, to the poetry of the journey, from the grateful traveler."

In explaining this dedication to Madame Hanska, Balzac states that the *poésie du voyage* was merely the poetry of it and nothing more, and that when she comes to Paris he will take pleasure in showing to her this intimate friend of Madame Carraud, this charming, intellectual woman whom he has not seen since.

Balzac went to Madame Marbouty's home to read to her the first acts of *L'Ecole des Ménages,* which she liked; a few days later, he returned, depressed because a great lady had told him it was *ennuyeux,* so she tried to cheer him. *Souvenirs inédits,* dated February, 1839, left by her, and a letter from her to Balzac dated March 12, 1840, in which she asks him to give her a ticket to the first performance of his play,[28] show that they were on excellent

[28] The play referred to is doubtless *Vautrin,* played for the first time March 14, 1840.

terms at this time. But later a coolness arose, and in April, 1844, Madame Marbouty wrote *Une fausse Position.* The personages in this novel are portraits, and Balzac appears under the name of Ulric. This explains why the dedication of *La Grenadière* was changed. Some writers seem to think that Madame Marbouty suggested to Balzac *La Muse du Département,* a Berrichon bluestocking.

Among the women in the *Comédie humaine* who have been identified with women the novelist knew in the course of his life, Béatrix (*Béatrix*), depicting the life of the Comtesse d'Agoult, is one of the most noted. Balzac says of this famous character: "Yes, Béatrix is even too much Madame d'Agoult. George Sand is at the height of felicity; she takes a little vengeance on her friend. Except for a few variations, *the story is true.*" [29]

Although Balzac wrote *Béatrix* with the information about the heroine which he had received from George Sand, he was acquainted with Madame d'Agoult. Descended from the Bethmanns of Hamburg or Frankfort, she was a native of Touraine, and played the rôle of a "great lady" at Paris. She became a journalist, formed a *liaison* with Émile de Girardin, and wrote extensively for the *Presse* under the name of Daniel Stern. She had some of the characteristics of the Princesse Belgiojoso; she abandoned her children. Balzac never liked her, and described her as a dreadful creature of whom Liszt was glad to be rid. She made advances to the novelist, and invited him to her home; he dined there

[29] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 527, February, 1840.

once with Ingres and once with Victor Hugo, but he did not enjoy her hospitality. Notwithstanding the aversion which Balzac had for her, he sent her autograph to Madame Hanska, and met her at various places.

Among women Balzac's most noted literary friend was George Sand, whom he called " my brother George." In 1831 Madame Dudevant, having attained some literary fame by the publication of *Indiana,* desired to meet the author of *La Peau de Chagrin,* who was living in the rue Cassini, and asked a mutual friend to introduce her.[30] After she had expressed her admiration for the talent of the young author, he in turn complimented her on her recent work, and as was his custom, changed the conversation to talk of himself and his plans. She found this interview helpful and he promised to counsel her. After this introduction Balzac visited her frequently. He would go puffing up the stairs of the many-storied house on the quai Saint-Michel where she lived. The avowed purpose of these visits was to advise her about her work, but thinking of some story he was writing, he would soon begin to talk of it.

[30] Different statements have been made as to who introduced George Sand to Balzac. In her *Histoire de ma Vie,* v. 9, pp. 12, 13, George Sand merely says it was a friend (a man). Gabriel Ferry, *Balzac et ses Amies,* p. 58, makes the same statement. Séché et Bertaut, *Balzac,* p. 61, state that it was La Touche who presented her to him, but Miss K. P. Wormeley, *A Memoir of Balzac,* p. 122, and Mme. Wladimir Karénine, *George Sand, sa Vie et ses Œuvres,* v. 2, p. 446, state that it was Jules Sandeau who presented her to him. Confirming this last statement, the Princess Radziwill states that it was Jules Sandeau, and that her aunt, Madame Honoré de Balzac, had so told her.

They seem to have had many enjoyable hours with each other. She relates that one evening when she and some friends had been dining with Balzac, after a rather peculiar dinner he put on with childish glee, a beautiful brand-new *robe de chambre* to show it to them, and purposed to accompany them in this costume to the Luxembourg, with a candlestick in his hand. It was late, the place was deserted, and when George Sand suggested that in returning home he might be assassinated, he replied: "Not at all! If I meet thieves they will think me insane, and will be afraid of me, or they will take me for a prince, and will respect me." It was a beautiful calm night, and he accompanied them thus, carrying his lighted candle in an exquisite carved candlestick, talking of his four Arabian horses which he did not have then, which he would have soon, which he never had had, but which he firmly believed he was going to have. He would have conducted them to the other end of Paris, if they had permitted him.

Once George Sand and Balzac had a discussion about the *Contes drôletiques* during which she said he was shocking, and he retorted that she was a prude, and departed, calling to her on the stairway: "*Vous n'êtes qu'une bête!*"[31] But they were only better friends after this.

Early in their literary career Balzac held this opinion of her: "She has none of the littleness of soul nor any of the base jealousies which obscure the brightness of so much contemporary talent. Dumas resembles her in this respect. George Sand is a very noble friend, and I would consult her with full confidence in my moments of doubt

[31] George Sand, *Histoire de ma Vie*, v. 9, p. 90.

on the logical course to pursue in such or such a situation; but I think she lacks the instinct of criticism: she allows herself to be too easily persuaded; she does not understand the art of refuting the arguments of her adversary nor of justifying herself."[32] He summarized their differences by telling her that she sought man as he ought to be, but that he took him as he is.

If Madame Hanska was not jealous of George Sand, she was at least interested to know the relations existing between her and Balzac, for we find him explaining: "Do not fear, madame, that Zulma Dudevant will ever see me attached to her chariot. . . . I only speak of this because more celebrity is fastened on that woman than she deserves; which is preparing for her a bitter autumn. . . . *Mon Dieu!* how is it that with such a splendid forehead you can think little things! I do not understand why, knowing my aversion for George Sand, you make me out her friend."[33] Since Madame Hanska was making a collection of autographs of famous people, Balzac promised to send her George Sand's, and he wished also to secure one of Aurore Dudevant, so that she might have her under both forms.

It is interesting to note that at various times Balzac compared Madame Hanska to George Sand. While he thought his "polar star" far more beautiful, she reminded him of George Sand by her coiffure, attitude and intellect, for she had the same feminine graces, together with the same force of mind.

[32] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 104.

[33] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 196, October 19, 1834, p. 266, July 17, 1835.

On his way to Sardinia, Balzac stopped to spend a few days with George Sand at her country home at Nohant. He found his "comrade George" in her dressing-gown, smoking a cigar after dinner in the chimney-corner of an immense solitary chamber. In spite of her dreadful troubles, she did not have a white hair; her swarthy skin had not deteriorated and her beautiful eyes were still dazzling. She had been at Nohant about a year, very sad, and working tremendously. He found her leading about the same life as he; she retired at six in the morning and arose at noon, while he retired at six in the evening and arose at midnight; but he conformed to her habits while spending these three days at her château, talking with her from five in the evening till five the next morning; after this, they understood each other better than they had done previously. He had censured her for deserting Jules Sandeau, but afterwards had the deepest compassion for her, as he too had found him to be a most ungrateful friend.

Balzac felt that Madame Dudevant was not lovable, and would always be difficult to love; she was a *garçon,* an artist, she was grand, generous, devoted, chaste; she had the traits of a man,— she was not a woman. He delighted in discussing social questions with a comrade to whom he did not need to show the *galanterie d'epiderme* necessary in conversation with ordinary women. He thought that she had great virtues which society misconstrued, and that after hours of discussion he had gained a great deal in making her recognize the necessity of marriage. In discussing with him the great questions of marriage and liberty, she said with great pride that they

were preparing by their writings a revolution in manners and morals, and that she was none the less struck by the objections to the one than by those to the other.

She knew just what he thought about her; she had neither force of conception, nor the gift of constructing plots, nor faculty of reaching the true, nor the art of pathos, but — without knowing the French language — she had *style.* Like him, she took her glory in raillery, and had a profound contempt for the public, which she called *Jumento.* Defending her past life, he says: "All the follies that she has committed are titles to fame in the eyes of great and noble souls. She was duped by Madame Dorval, Bocage, Lammennais, etc., etc. Through the same sentiment she is now the dupe of Liszt and Madame d'Agoult; she has just realized it for this couple as for la Dorval, for she has one of those minds that are powerful in the study, through intellect, but extremely easy to entrap on the domain of reality." [34]

During this week-end visit, Madame Dudevant related to Balzac the story of Liszt and Madame d'Agoult, which he reproduced in *Béatrix,* since in her position, she could not do so herself. In the same book, George Sand is portrayed as Mademoiselle des Touches, with the complexion, pale olive by day, and white under artificial light, characteristic of Italian beauty. The face, rather long than oval, resembles that of some beautiful Isis. Her hair, black and thick, falls in plaited loops over her neck, like the head-dress with rigid double locks of the statues at Memphis, accentuating very finely the general severity of her features. She has a full, broad forehead, bright

[34] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 464, March 2, 1838.

with its smooth surface on which the light lingers, and molded like that of a hunting Diana; a powerful, wilful brow, calm and still. The eyebrows, strongly arched, bend over the eyes in which the fire sparkles now and again like that of fixed stars. The cheek-bones, though softly rounded, are more prominent than in most women, and confirm the impression of strength. The nose, narrow and straight, has high-cut nostrils, and the mouth is arched at the corners. Below the nose the lip is faintly shaded by a down that is wholly charming; nature would have blundered if she had not placed there that tender smoky tinge.

Balzac admitted that this was the portrait of Madame Dudevant, saying that he rarely portrayed his friends, exceptions being G. Planche in Claude Vignon, and George Sand in Camille Maupin (Mademoiselle des Touches), both with their consent.[35]

Madame Dudevant was an excessive smoker, and during Balzac's visit to her, she had him smoke a hooka and latakia which he enjoyed so much that he wrote to Madame Hanska, asking her to get him a hooka in Moscow, as he thought she lived near there, and it was there or in Constantinople that the best could be found; he wished her also, if she could find true latakia in Moscow, to send him five or six pounds, as opportunities were rare to get it from Constantinople. Later, on his visit to Sardinia, he wrote her from Ajaccio: "As for the latakia, I have just discovered (laugh at me for a whole year) that

[35] For further details as to the resemblance of Mademoiselle des Touches to George Sand, see Mme. Karénine, *George Sand, sa Vie et ses Œuvres*, v. 2, pp. 369, 370.

Latakia is a village of the island of Cyprus, a stone's throw from here, where a superior tobacco is made, named from the place, and that I can get it here. So mark out that item." [36]

George Sand and Balzac discussed their work freely and did not hesitate to condemn either plot or character of which they did not approve. Some of Balzac's women shocked her, but she liked *La première Demoiselle* (afterwards *L'École des Ménages*), a play which Madame Surville found superb, but which Madame Hanska discouraged because she did not like the plot. She aided him in a financial manner by signing one of his stories, *Voyage d'un Moineau de Paris.* At that time, Balzac needed money and Stahl (Hetzel) refused to insert in his book, *Scènes de la Vie privée des Animaux* (2 vols., 1842), this story of Balzac's, who had already furnished several articles for this collection. George Sand signed her name, and in this way, Balzac obtained the money.

[36] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 464–471, March, April, 1838. This contradicts the statement of S. de Lovenjoul, *Bookman,* v. 14, p. 615, 1902, that Balzac had a horror of tobacco and is known to have smoked only once, when a cigar given him by Eugène Sue made him very ill. He evidently had this excerpt of a letter in mind: "I have never known what drunkenness was, except from a cigar which Eugène Sue made me smoke against my will, and it was that which enabled me to paint the drunkenness for which you blame me in the *Voyage à Java.*"..*Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 17, March, 1833. This visit to George Sand was made five years after this letter was written. Or S. de Lovenjoul might have had in mind the statement of Théophile Gautier that Balzac could not endure tobacco in any form; he anathematized the pipe, proscribed the cigar, did not even tolerate the Spanish *papelito,* and only the Asiatic narghile found grace in his sight. He allowed this only as a curious trinket, and on account of its local color. *Portraits Contemporains,* pp. 115, 116.

Madame Dudevant not only remained a true friend to Balzac in a literary and financial sense, but was glad to defend his character, and was firm in refuting statements derogatory to him. In apologizing to him for an article that had appeared without her knowledge in the *Revue independente,* edited by her, she asked his consent to write a large work about him. He tried to dissuade her, telling her that she would create enemies for herself, but, after persistence on her part, he asked her to write a preface to the *Comédie humaine.* The plan of the work, however, was very much modified, and did not appear until after Balzac's death.

Balzac dined frequently with Madame Dudevant, and political as well as social and literary questions were discussed. He enjoyed opposing her views; after his return from his prolonged visit to Madame Hanska in St. Petersburg (1843), George Sand twitted him by asking him to give his *Impressions de Voyage.*

A story told at Issoudun illustrates further the genial association of the two authors: Balzac was dining one day at the Hôtel de la Cloche in company with George Sand. She had brought her physician, who was to accompany her to Nohant. The conversation turned on the subject of insane people, and the peculiar manner in which the exterior signs of insanity are manifested. The physician claimed to be an expert in recognizing an insane person at first sight. George Sand asked very seriously: "Do you see any here?" Balzac was eating, as always, ravenously, and his tangled hair followed the movement of his head and arm. "There is one!" said the Doctor; "no doubt about it!" George Sand burst out laughing,

Balzac also, and, the introduction made, the confused physician was condemned to pay for the dinner.

Balzac expresses his admiration for her in the dedication of the *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées:*

"To George Sand.

"This dedication, dear George, can add nothing to the glory of your name, which will cast its magic luster on my book; but in making it there is neither modesty nor self-interest on my part. I desire to bear testimony to the true friendship between us which continues unchanged in spite of travels and absence,— in spite, too, of our mutual hard work and the maliciousness of the world. This feeling will doubtless never change. The procession of friendly names which accompany my books mingles pleasure with the pain their great number causes me, for they are not written without anxiety, to say nothing of the reproach cast upon me for my alarming fecundity,— as if the world which poses before me were not more fecund still. Would it not be a fine thing, George, if some antiquary of long past literatures should find in that procession none but great names, noble hearts, pure and sacred friendships,— the glories of this century? May I not show myself prouder of that certain happiness than of other successes which are always uncertain? To one who knows you well it must ever be a great happiness to be allowed to call himself, as I do here,

"Your friend,

"De Balzac."

# CHAPTER IV

## BUSINESS AND SOCIAL FRIENDS

### MADAME BÉCHET — MADAME WERDET

"Proprium humani ingenii, odisse quem laeserit." [1]

A woman with whom Balzac was to have business dealings early in his literary career was Madame Charles Béchet, of whom he said: "This publisher is a woman, a widow whom I have never seen, and whom I do not know. I shall not send off this letter until the signatures are appended on both sides, so that my missive may carry you good news about my interests; . . ." [2]

Thus began a business relation which, like many of Balzac's financial affairs, was to end unhappily. At first he liked her very much and dined with her, meeting in her company such noted literary men as Béranger, but as usual, he delayed completing his work, meanwhile resorting, in mitigation of his offense, to tactics such as the following words will indicate: ". . . a pretty watch given at the right moment to Madame Béchet may win me a month's freedom. I am going to overwhelm her with gifts to get peace." [3]

Balzac often caused his publishers serious annoyance by re-writing his stories frequently, but at the beginning of this business relation he agreed with Madame Béchet

[1] Tacitus — *Agricola.* XLII.
[2] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 51, October 9, 1833.
[3] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 177, August 1, 1834.

about the cost of corrections. He says of the fair publisher: "The widow Béchet has been sublime: she has taken upon herself the expense of more than four thousand francs of corrections, which were set down to me. Is this not still pleasanter?" [4]

But this could not last long for she became financially embarrassed and then had to be very strict with him. She refused to advance any money until his work was delivered to her and called upon him to pay for the corrections. This he resented greatly:

> "Madame Béchet has become singularly ill-natured and will hurt my interests very much. In paying me, she charges me with corrections which amount on the twelve volumes to three thousand francs, and also for my copies, which will cost me fifteen hundred more. Thus four thousand five hundred francs and my discounts, diminish by six thousand the thirty-three thousand. She could not lose a great fortune more clumsily, for Werdet estimates at five hundred thousand francs the profits to be made out of the next edition of the *Études de Mœurs*. I find Werdet the active, intelligent, and devoted publisher that I want. I have still six months before I can be rid of Madame Béchet; for I have three volumes to do, and it is impossible to count on less than two months to each volume." [5]

She evidently relented, for he wrote later that Madame Béchet had paid him the entire thirty-three thousand francs. This, however, did not end their troubles, and

[4] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 398, 1834. Letter to Madame Surville.

[5] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 242, March 30, 1835.

he longed to be free from his obligations, and to sever all connection with her.

In the spring of 1836, Madame Béchet became Madame Jacquillart. Whether she was influenced by her husband or had become weary of Balzac's delays, she became firmer. The novelist felt that she was too exacting, for he was working sixteen hours a day to complete the last two volumes for her, and he believed that the suit with which she threatened him was prompted by his enemies, who seemed to have sworn his ruin. Madame Béchet lost but little time in carrying out her threat, for a few days after this he writes:

> "Do you know by what I have been interrupted? By a legal notice from Béchet, who summons me to furnish her within twenty-four hours my two volumes in 8vo, with a penalty of fifty francs for every day's delay! I must be a great criminal and God wills that I shall expiate my crimes! Never was such torture! This woman has had ten volumes 8vo out of me in two years, and yet she complains at not getting twelve!" [6]

There had been question of a lawsuit as early as the autumn of 1835; to avoid this he was then trying to finish the *Fleur-des-Pois* (afterwards *Le Contrat de Mariage*). But their relations were more cordial at that time, for a short time later, he writes: "My publisher, the sublime Madame Béchet, has been foolish enough to send the corrected proofs to St. Petersburg. I am told nothing is spoken of there but of the *excellence of this new masterpiece.*" [7]

[6] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 332, June 12, 1836.

[7] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 20, October, 1835. Letter to Madame Surville.

Both Madame Béchet and Werdet were in despair over Balzac's journey to Vienna in 1835, but things grew even worse the next year. The novelist gives this glimpse of his troubles:

> "My mind itself was crushed; for the failure of the *Chronique* came upon me at Saché, at M. de Margonne's, where, by a wise impulse, I was plunged in work to rid myself of that odious Béchet. I had undertaken to write in ten days (it was that which kept me from going to Nemours!) the two volumes which had been demanded of me, and in eight days I had invented and composed *Les Illusions perdues,* and had written a third of it. Think what such application meant! All my faculties were strained; I wrote fifteen hours a day. . . ." [8]

In explaining Balzac's association with Madame Béchet, M. Henri d'Almeras states that Madame Béchet was interested, at first, in attaching celebrated writers to her publishing house, or those who had promise of fame. She organized weekly dinner parties, which took place on Saturday, and here assembled Béranger, Henri de Latouche, Louis Reybaud, Léon Gozlan, Brissot-Thivars, Balzac and Dr. Gentil. It was with Madame Béchet as with Charles Gosselin. The publication, less lucrative than she expected, of the first series of the *Scènes de la Vie parisienne* and the *Scènes de la Vie de Province* made it particularly disagreeable to her to receive the reproaches of a writer who, with his admirable talent, could not become resigned to meet with less success than other litterateurs not so good as he.

[8] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 342, July 13, 1836.

George Sand
*En costume masculin*

The termination of their business relations is recounted thus: "*Illusions perdues* appears this week. On the 17th I have a meeting to close up all claims from Madame Béchet and Werdet. So there is one cause of torment the less." [9]

If M. Hugues Rebell is correct in his surmise, at least a part of Werdet's admiration for the novelist was inspired by his wife, who had become a great admirer of the works of the young writer, not well known at that time. Madame Werdet persuaded her husband to speak to Madame Béchet about Balzac, and to advise her to publish his works. Her husband did so, but Madame Werdet did not stop at this. She convinced him that he should leave Madame Béchet and become Balzac's sole publisher; this he was for five years, and, moreover, served him as his banker. M. Rebell thinks also that Madame Werdet is the "delicious *bourgeoise*" referred to in Balzac's letter to Madame Surville.[10]

MADAME ROSSINI — MADAME RÉCAMIER — LA DUCHESSE DE DINO — LA COMTESSE APPONY — MADAME DE BERNARD — MADAME DAVID — LA BARONNE GÉRARD

"You wish to know if I have met Fœdora, if she is true? A woman from cold Russia, the Princess Bagration, is supposed in Paris to be the model for her. I have reached the seventy-second woman who has had the impertinence to recognize herself in that character. They

[9] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 374, January 15, 1836.

[10] *Les Inspiratrices de Balzac*, pp. 16–18. Allusion is made to the well known letter of Saturday, October 12, 1833. This "delicious *bourgeoise*" is compared to Blanche d'Azay in the *Péché véniel*, one of the *Contes drôlatiques*.

are all of ripe age. Even Madame Récamier is willing to *fædorize herself*. Not a word of all that is true. I made Fœdora out of two women whom I have known without having been intimate with them. Observation sufficed me, besides a few confidences. There are also some kind souls who will have it that I have courted the handsomest of Parisian courtesans and have concealed myself behind her curtains. These are calumnies. I have met a Fœdora; but that one I shall not paint; besides, it has been a long time since *La Peau de Chagrin* was published." [11]

Quoting Amédée Pichot and Dr. Ménière, S. de Lovenjoul states that Mademoiselle Olympe Pélissier is the woman whom Balzac used as a model for his Fœdora, and that, like Raphael, he concealed himself in her bedroom. She is indeed the woman without heart; she kept in the rue Neuve-du-Luxembourg a salon frequented by noted political people such as the Duc de Fitz-James. Being rich as well as beautiful, and having an exquisite voice, she was highly attractive to the novelist, who aspired to her hand, and who regarded her refusal with bitterness all his life. Several years later she was married to her former voice teacher, M. Rossini.

Balzac met the famous Olympe early in his literary career; he says of her:

"Two years ago, Sue quarreled with a *mauvaise courtesane* celebrated for her beauty (she is the original of Vernet's *Judith*). I lowered myself to reconcile them, and they gave her to me. M. de Fitz-James, the Duc de Duras, and the old count went to her house to talk, as on neutral

[11] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 9, January, 1833.

ground, much as people walk in the alley of the Tuileries to meet one another; and one expects better conduct of me than of those gentlemen! . . . As for Rossini, I wish him to write me a nice letter, and he has just invited me to dine with his mistress, who happens to be that beautiful *Judith,* the former mistress of Horace Vernet and of Sue, you know. . . ." [12]

Some months after this Balzac gave a dinner to his *Tigres,* as he called the group occupying the same box with him at the opera. Concerning this dinner, he writes:

"Next Saturday I give a dinner to the *Tigres* of my opera-box, and I am preparing sumptuosities out of all reason. I shall have Rossini and Olympe, his *cara dona,* who will preside. . . . My dinner? Why, it made a great excitement. Rossini declared he had never seen eaten or drunk anything better among sovereigns. This dinner was sparkling with wit. The beautiful Olympe was graceful, sensible and perfect." [13]

Balzac was a great admirer of Rossini, wrote the words for one of his compositions, and dedicated to him *Le Contrat de Mariage.*

Among the famous salons that Balzac frequented was that of Madame Récamier, who was noted even more for her distinction and grace than for her beauty. She appreciated the ability of the young writer, and invited him

[12] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 18, 84, March, November, 1833.

[13] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 200, 211, October 26, November 26, 1834. The present writer has not been able to find any date that would prove positively that Balzac knew Madame Rossini before writing *La Peau de Chagrin* which appeared in 1830–1831.

to read in her salon long before the world recognized his name. He admired her greatly; of one of his visits to her he writes:

"Yesterday I went to see Madame Récamier, whom I found ill but wonderfully bright and kind. I have heard that she did much good, and acted very nobly in being silent and making no complaint of the ungrateful beings she has met. No doubt she saw upon my face a reflection of what I thought of her, and, without explaining to herself this little sympathy, she was charming." [14]

Although one would not suspect Madame Hanska of being jealous of Madame Récamier, perhaps it is because she wished to *fœdorize* herself that Balzac writes:

"*Mon Dieu!* do not be jealous of any one. I have not been to see Madame Récamier or any one else. . . . As to my relations with the person you speak of, I never had any that were tender; I have none now. I answered a very unimportant letter, and, apropos of a sentence, I explained myself; that was all. There are relations of politeness due to women of a certain rank whom one has known; but a visit to Madame Récamier is not, I suppose, *relations*, when one visits her once in three months." [15]

One of the famous women whom Balzac met soon after he began to acquire literary fame was the Duchesse de Dino, who was married to Talleyrand's nephew in 1809.

"When her husband's uncle became French Ambassador at Vienna in 1814, she went with him as mistress of the

[14] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 25, May 29, 1833.

[15] *Lettres à 'lÊtrangère*, v. 1, pp. 32, 74, August 19, November 6, 1833.

embassy. When he was sent to London in 1830, she accompanied him in the same capacity. She lived with him till his death in 1838, entirely devoted to his welfare, and she has given us in these pages a picture of the old Talleyrand which is among the masterpieces of memoir-writing. From this connection she was naturally for many years in the very heart of political affairs, as no one was, save perhaps that other Dorothea of the Baltic, the Princess de Lieven. To great beauty and spirit she added unusual talents, and in the best sense was a great lady of the *haute politique.*" [16]

Balzac had met her in the salon of Madame Appony, but had never visited her in her home until 1836, when he went to Rochecotte to see the famous Prince de Talleyrand, having a great desire to have a view of the "witty turkeys who plucked the eagle and made it tumble into the ditch of the house of Austria." Several years later, on his return from St. Petersburg, he stopped in Berlin, where he was invited to a grand dinner at the home of the Count and Countess Bresson. He gave his arm to the Duchesse de Talleyrand (ex-Dino), whom he thought the most beautiful lady present, although she was fifty-two years of age.

The Duchess has left this appreciation of the novelist: ". . . his face and bearing are vulgar, and I imagine his ideas are equally so. Undoubtedly, he is a very clever man, but his conversation is neither easy nor light, but on the contrary, very dull. He watched and examined all of us most minutely." [17]

[16] Princess Radziwill, the *Nation,* v. 92, p. 15, January 5, 1911.

[17] *Ibid.* Taken from the *Chronique* of the Duchesse de Dino, written 1831–1850.

Notwithstanding that the beautiful Dorothea did not admire Balzac, he was sincere in his appreciation of her. A novel recently brought to light, *L'Amour Masqué,* or as the author first called it, *Imprudence et Bonheur,* was written for her. Balzac had been her guest repeatedly; he had recognized in her one of those rare women, who by their intelligence and, as it were, instinctive appreciation of genius can compensate to a great *incompris* like Balzac for the lack of recognition on the part of his contemporaries; one of those women near whom, thanks to tactful treatment, a depressed man will regain confidence in himself and courage to go on.[18]

Of the distinguished houses which were open to Balzac, that of the Comte Appony was one of the most beautiful. This protégé of the Prince de Metternich, having had the rare good fortune to please both governments, was retained by Louis-Philippe, and was as well liked and appreciated in the rôle of ambassador and diplomat as in that of man of the world. The Countess Appony possessed a very peculiar charm, and was a type of feminine distinction. Balls and receptions were given frequently in her home, where all was of a supreme elegance.

Balzac visited the Count and Countess frequently, often having a letter or a message to deliver for the Comtesse Marie Potoçka. He realized that it would be of advantage to be friendly toward the Ambassador of Austria, and he doubtless enjoyed the society of his charming wife. He writes of one of these visits:

"Alas! your *moujik* also has been *un poco* in that mar-

[18] Albert Schinz, the *Bookman,* v. 33, p. 366, June, 1911.

ket of false smiles and charming toilets; he has made his début at Madame Appony's,— for the house of Balzac must live on good terms with the house of Austria,— and your *moujik* had some success. He was examined with the curiosity felt for animals from distant regions. There were presentations on presentations, which bored him so that he placed himself in a corner with some Russians and Poles. But their names are so difficult to pronounce that he cannot tell you anything about them, further than that one was a very ugly lady, friend of Madame Hahn, and a Countess Schouwalof, sister of Madame Jeroslas. . . . Is that right? The *moujik* will go there every two weeks, if his lady permits him." [19]

The novelist met many prominent people at these receptions, among them Prince Esterhazy; he went to the beautiful soirées of Madame Appony while refusing to go elsewhere, even to the opera.

Several women Balzac probably met through his intimacy with their husbands. Among these were Madame de Bernard, whose name was Clementine, but whom he called "Mentine" and "La Fosseuse," this character being the frail, nervous young girl in *Le Médecin de Campagne.* In August, 1831, M. Charles de Bernard wrote a very favorable article about *La Peau de Chagrin* in the *Gazette de Franche-Comté,* which he was editing at that time. This naturally pleased the novelist; their friendship continued through many years, and in 1844, Balzac dedicated to him *Sarrazine,* written in 1830.

[19] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 226, January 16, 1835.

Early in his literary career Balzac knew Baron Gérard, and in writing to the painter, sent greetings to Madame Gérard. Much later in life, while posing for his bust, made by David d'Angers, he saw Madame David frequently, and learned to like her. He felt flattered that she thought he looked so much younger than he really was. On his return from St. Petersburg, in 1843, he brought her a pound of Russian tea, which, as he explained, had no other merit than the exceeding difficulties it had encountered in passing through twenty custom-houses.

### LA COMTESSE VISCONTI — MADAME DE VALETTE — MADEMOISELLE KOZLOWSKA

"Madame de Visconti, of whom you speak to me, is one of the most amiable of women, of an infinite, exquisite kindness; a delicate and elegant beauty. She helps me much to bear my life. She is gentle, and full of firmness, immovable and implacable in her ideas and her repugnances. She is a person to be depended on. She has not been fortunate, or rather, her fortune and that of the Count are not in keeping with this splendid name. . . . It is a friendship which consoles me under many griefs. But, unfortunately, I see her very seldom." [20]

Madame Émile Guidoboni-Visconti, née (Frances Sarah) Lowell, was an Englishwoman, another *étrangère*. Balzac shared the same box with her at the Italian opera, and in the summer of 1836, he went to Turin to look after some legal business for the Viscontis. He had not known them long before this, for he writes, in speaking of *Le Lys*

[20] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, pp. 530, 531, February 10, 1840.

*dans la Vallée:* Do they not say that I have painted Madame Visconti? Such are the judgments to which we are exposed. You know that I had the proofs in Vienna, and that portrait was written at Saché and corrected at La Bouleaunière, before I had ever seen Madame Visconti." [21]

Either this new friendship became too ardent for the comfort of Madame Hanska, or she heard false reports concerning it, for she made objections to which Balzac responds:

> "Must I renounce the Italian opera, the only pleasure I have in Paris, because I have no other seat than in a box where there is also a charming and gracious woman? If calumny, which respects nothing, demands it, I shall give up music also. I was in a box among people who were an injury to me, and brought me into disrepute. I had to go elsewhere, and, in all conscience, I did not wish Olympe's box. But let us drop the subject." [22]

The friendship continued to grow, however, and in December, 1836, the novelist offered her the manuscript of *La vieille Fille.* He visited her frequently in her home, and on his return from an extended tour to Corsica and Sardinia in 1838 he spent some time in Milan, looking after some business interests for the Visconti family.

When Balzac was living secluded from his creditors, Madame Visconti showed her friendship for him in a very material way. The bailiff had been seeking him for

[21] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 351, October 1, 1836. La Bouleaunière was the home of Madame de Berny, at Nemours. Balzac visited Madame Hanska at Vienna in the spring of 1835.

[22] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 348, September 30, 1836.

three weeks, when a vindictive Ariadne, having a strong interest in seeing Balzac conducted to prison, presented herself at the home of the creditor and informed him that the novelist was residing in the Champs-Élysées, at the home of Madame Visconti. Nothing could have been more exact than this information. Two hours later, the home was surrounded, and Balzac, interrupted in the midst of a chapter of one of his novels, saw two bailiffs enter, armed with the traditional club; they showed him a cab waiting at the door. A woman had betrayed him — now a woman saved him. Madame Visconti flung ten thousand francs in the faces of the bailiffs, and showed them the door.[23]

During Balzac's residence *aux Jardies* he was quite near Madame Visconti, as she was living in a rather insignificant house just opposite the home Balzac had built. He enjoyed her companionship, and when she moved to Versailles he regretted not being able to see her more frequently than once a fortnight, for she was one of the few who gave him their sympathy at that time.

Several months later Balzac was disappointed in her,

[23] Eugène de Mirecourt, *Les Contemporains,* pp. 68, 69, does not give the date of this incident. Keim et Lumet, *H. de Balzac,* p. 179, state that it occurred in 1837, but E. E. Saltus, *Balzac,* pp. 134, 135, states that it was in connection with the indebtedness to William Duckett, editor of the *Dictionnaire de la Conversation,* in 1846. F. Lawton, *Balzac,* pp. 144–147, states that it was in connection with his indebtedness to Duckett on account of the *Chronicle,* and that Balzac was sued in 1837. If the letter to Mme. de V., *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 160, was addressed to Madame Visconti, he was owing her in 1840. M. F. Sandars, *Honoré de Balzac,* p. 240, states that about 1846–1848, Balzac borrowed 10,000 or 15,000 francs from the Viscontis, giving them as guarantee shares in the Chemin de Fer du Nord.

and referred to her bitterly as *L'Anglaise, L'Angleterre,* or "the lady who lived at Versailles." He felt that she was ungrateful and inconsiderate, and, while he remained on speaking terms with her, he regarded this friendship as one of the misfortunes of his life.

After the death of Madame Visconti (April 28, 1883), a picture of Balzac which had been in her possession was placed in the museum at Tours. This is supposed to be the portrait painted by Gerard-Séguin, exhibited in the *Salon* in 1842, and presented to her by Balzac at that time.

In answering several of Madame Hanska's questions, Balzac writes: "No, I was not happy in writing *Béatrix;* you ought to have known it. Yes, Sarah is Madame de Visconti; yes, Mademoiselle des Touches is George Sand; yes, Béatrix is even too much Madame d'Agoult." [24] A few months later he writes: "The friendship of which I spoke to you, and at which you laughed, apropos of the dedication, is not all I thought it. English prejudices are terrible, they take away what is an essential to all artists, the *laisser-aller,* unconstraint. Never have I done so well as when, in the *Lys,* I explained the women of that country in a few words." [25]

From the above, one would suppose that Madame Visconti is the "Sarah" whom Balzac addresses in the dedication of *Béatrix:*

"To Sarah.

"In clear weather, on the Mediterranean shores, where

[24] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 527, February, 1840.

[25] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 538, May 15, 1840. This is probably the basis for Mr. Monahan's statement that Balzac pictured Madame Visconti as Lady Dudley in *Le Lys dans la Vallée.*

formerly extended the magnificent empire of your name, the sea sometimes allows us to perceive beneath the mist of waters a sea-flower, one of Nature's masterpieces; the lacework of its tissues, tinged with purple, russet, rose, violet, or gold, the crispness of its living filigrees, the velvet texture, all vanish as soon as curiosity draws it forth and spreads it on the strand. Thus would the glare of publicity offend your tender modesty; so, in dedicating this work to you, I must reserve a name which would, indeed, be its pride. But, under the shelter of this half-concealment, your superb hands may bless it, your noble brow may bend and dream over it, your eyes, full of motherly love, may smile upon it, since you are here at once present and veiled. Like this pearl of the ocean-garden, you will dwell on the fine, white, level sand where your beautiful life expands, hidden by a wave that is transparent only to certain friendly and reticent eyes. I would gladly have laid at your feet a work in harmony with your perfections; but as that was impossible, I knew, for my consolation, that I was gratifying one of your instincts by offering you something to protect.

"De Balzac."[26]

In sending the corrected proofs of *Béatrix* to "Madame de V——," Balzac writes:

"My dear friend,— Here are the proofs of *Béatrix*: a book for which you have made me feel an affection, such as I have not felt for any other book. It has been the

[26] S. de Lovenjoul, *Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac,* p. 496, states that the "Sarah" to whom Balzac dedicated *Béatrix* is no other than an Englishwoman, Frances Sarah Lowell, who became the Comtesse Émile Guidoboni-Visconti. She was born at Hilks, September 29, 1804, and died at Versailles April 28, 1883.

ring which has united our friendship. I never give these things except to those I love, for they bear witness to my long labors, and to that patience of which I spoke to you. My nights have been passed over these terrible pages, and amongst all to whom I have presented them, I know no heart more pure and noble than yours, in spite of those little attacks of want of faith in me, which no doubt arises from your great wish to find a poor author more perfect than he can be. . . ." [27]

In contradiction to the preceding, M. Léon Séché thinks that *Béatrix* was dedicated to Madame Hélène-Marie-Félicité Valette, and that she is the " Madame de V——" to whom the letter is addressed. Hélène de Valette (she probably had no right to the " nobiliary " *de* although she signed her name thus) was the daughter of Pierre Valette, Lieutenant de Vaisseau, who after the death of Madame Valette, in 1818, became a priest at Vannes in order to be near their daughter Hélène, who was in the convent of the Ursulines. At the age of eighteen he married her to a notary of Vannes, thirty years her senior, a widower with a bad reputation, whose name was Jean-Marie-Angèle Gougeon. Scarcely had she married when she had an intrigue with a physician; her husband died soon after this, and she resumed her maiden name. She adopted the daughter of a *paludier,*[28] Le Gallo, whose wife had saved her from drowning, and named her " Marie " in memory of Balzac's favorite name for herself.

In stating that the letter to " Madame de V——" is addressed to Madame Valette, M. Séché publishes a letter

[27] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 159, 1840. Letter to Mme de V. . . .

[28] *Paludier.* One who works in the salt marshes.

almost identical with the one that is found in both the *Memoir and Letters of Balzac* (v. 2, p. 159) and the *Correspondance,* 1819–1850 (v. 2, p. 4), one of the chief differences being that in this letter Balzac addresses her as "My dear Marie" instead of "My dear friend." In telling "Madame de V——" that he is sending her the proofs of *Béatrix,* Balzac refers to the suppression of his play *Vautrin,* and says that the director *des beaux-arts* has come a second time to offer him an indemnity which *ne faisait pas votre somme.* This might lead one to think that he had had some financial dealings with her.

In the dedication of *Béatrix,* dated *Aux Jardies,* December, 1838, Balzac speaks of Sarah's being a pearl of the Mediterranean. In the Island of Malta is a town called Cité-Vallette — suggestive of the name Félicité Valette. Félicité is also the name of the heroine, Félicité des Touches, although Marie is the name of Madame Valette that Balzac liked best.

In 1836, after reading some of Balzac's novels, Madame de Valette wrote to Balzac. Attracted by her, he went to Guérande where he took his meals at a little hotel kept by the demoiselles Bouniol, mentioned in *Béatrix.* Under her guidance he roamed over the country and then wrote *Béatrix.* She pretended to him to have been born at Guérande and to have been reared as a *paludière* by her godmother, Madame de Lamoignon-Lavalette, whence the reference in the dedication to the former "empire of your name." Her real godmother was Marie-Félicité Burgaud. Balzac did not know that she had been married to the notary Gougeon, and thought that her mother was still living.

When Madame de Valette went to Paris to reside, she was noted for her beauty and eccentric manners; she rode horseback to visit Balzac *aux Jardies.* She met a young writer, Edmond Cador, who revealed to Balzac all that she had kept from him. This deception provoked Balzac and gave rise to an exchange of rather sharp letters, and a long silence followed. After Balzac's death she gave Madame Honoré de Balzac trouble concerning *Béatrix* and her correspondence with Balzac, which she claimed. She died January 14, 1873, at the home of the Baron Larrey whom she had appointed as her residuary legatee. She is buried in the Père-Lachaise cemetery, and on her tomb is written *Veuve Gougeon.*

In her letters to Balzac, given by Spoelberch de Lovenjoul to the French Academy, she addressed him as " My dear beloved treasure," and signed her name *Babouino.* There exists a letter from her to him in which she tells him that she is going to Vannes to visit for a fortnight, after which she will go to Béarn to make the acquaintance of her husband's people, and asks him to address her under the name of Hélène-Marie.[29]

After the death of Madame de Valette, the Baron Larrey, in memory of her relations with Balzac, presented to the city of Tours the corrected proofs of *Béatrix,* and a portrait of Balzac which he had received from her.

[29] Léon Séché, *Les Inspiratrices de Balzac, Hélène de Valette,* Les *Annales Romantiques,* pp. 321–333, 1908–1909, supposes that this is another falsehood, since he could find no record of where any member of the Gougeon family had ever lived in Béarn. Much of his information has been secured from Dr. Closmadeuc, who lived at Vannes and who attended Madame de Valette in her late years; also, from her adopted daughter, Mlle. Le Gallo.

Among Balzac's numerous Russian friends was Mademoiselle Sophie Kozlowska. "Sophie is the daughter of Prince Kozlowski, whose marriage was not recognized; you must have heard of that very witty diplomat, who is with Prince Paskevitch in Warsaw." [30]

This friendship seems to have been rather close for a while, Balzac addressing her as *Sofka, Sof, Sophie* and *carissima Sofi.* Just before the presentation of his play *Quinola* he wrote her, asking for the names and addresses of her various Russian friends who wished seats, as many enemies were giving false names. He wanted to place the beautiful ladies in front, and wished to know in what party she would be, and the definite number of tickets and location desired for each friend.

In this same jovial vein he writes her: "Mina wrote me that you were ill, and that dealt me a blow as if one had told Napoleon his aide-de-camp was dead." [31] His attitude towards her changed some months after writing this; she became the means of alienating his friend Gavault from him, or at least he so suspected, and thought that she was influenced by Madame Visconti. This coldness soon turned to enmity, and she completely won from him his former friend, Gavault, who had become very much enamored with her. The novelist expressed the same bitterness of feeling for her as he did for Madame Visconti, but as the years went by, either his aversion to

[30] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 456, January 20, 1838. By explaining to Madame Hanska who Sophie is, one would not suppose that Balzac met her at Madame Hanska's home, as M. E. Pilon states in his article, *Les Dédicaces dans l'oeuvre de Balzac, Revue politique et littéraire,* p. 671, 1902.

[31] *Correspondance,* 1819–1850, v. 2, pp. 30, 31, March 12, 1842.

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these two women softened, or he thought it good policy to retain their good will, for he wished their names placed on his invitation list.

Balzac's feeling of friendship for her must have been sincere at one time, for he dedicated *La Bourse:*

"To Sofka.

"Have you not observed, mademoiselle, that the painters and sculptors of the Middle Ages, when they placed two figures in adoration, one on each side of a fair Saint, never fail to give them a family likeness? On seeing your name among those who are dear to me, and under whose auspices I place my works, remember that touching harmony, and you will see in this not so much an act of homage as an expression of the brotherly affection of your devoted servant,

"De Balzac."

LA COMTESSE TURHEIM — LA COMTESSE DE BOCARMÉ — LA COMTESSE MERLIN — LA PRINCESSE GALITZIN DE GENTHOL — LA BARONNE DE ROTHSCHILD — LA COMTESSE MAFFEI — LA COMTESSE SERAFINA SANSEVERINO — LA COMTESSE BOLOGNINI

"I have found a letter from the kind Countess Loulou, who loves you and whom you love, and in whose letter your name is mentioned in a melancholy sentence which drew tears from my eyes; . . . I am going to write to the good Loulou without telling her all she has done by her letter, for such things are difficult to express, even to that kind German woman. But she spoke of you with so much soul that I can tell her that what in her is friendship, in me is worship that can never end."[32]

[32] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 480, June 5, 1838.

The Countess Louise Turheim called "Loulou" by her intimate friends and her sister, Princess Constantine Razumofsky, met Madame Hanska in the course of her prolonged stay in Vienna in 1835, and the three women remained friends throughout their lives. The Countess Loulou was a canoness, and Balzac met her while visiting in Vienna; he admired her for herself as well as for her friendship for his *Châtelaine*. Her brother-in-law, Prince Razumofsky, wished Balzac to secure him a reader at Paris, but since there was limitation as to the price, he had some trouble in finding a suitable one. This made a correspondence with the Countess necessary, as it was she who made the request; but Madame Hanska was not only willing that Balzac should write to her but sent him her address, and they exchanged messages frequently about the canoness.

In 1842, *Une double Famille,* a story written in 1830, was dedicated:

"To Madame la Comtesse de Turheim
"As a token of remembrance and affectionate respect.
"De Balzac."

The Countess de Bocarmé, née du Chasteler, was an artist who helped Balzac by painting in water-colors the portraits of her uncle, the field-marshal, and Andréas Hofer; he wished these in order to be able to depict the heroes of the Tyrol in the campaign of 1809. She painted also the entire armorial for the *Études de Mœurs;* this consisted of about one hundred armorial bearings, and was a masterpiece. She promised to paint his study at Passy in water-colors, which was to be a souvenir for

Madame Hanska of the place where he was to finish paying his debts. All this pleased the novelist greatly, but she presented him with one gift which he considered as in bad taste. This was a sort of monument with a muse crowning him, another writing on a folio: *Comédie humaine,* with *Divo Balzac* above.

Madame de Bocarmé had been reared in a convent with a niece of Madame Rosalie Rzewuska, had traveled much, and was rather brilliant in describing what she had seen. She visited Balzac while he was living *aux Jardies.* She was a great friend of the Countess Chlendowska, whose husband was Balzac's bookseller, and the novelist counted on her to lend the money for one of his business schemes. Being fond of whist, she took Madame Chlendowska to Balzac's home during his illness of a few weeks, and they entertained him by playing cards with him.

Balzac called her *Bettina,* and after she left Paris for the Château de Bury in Belgium, he took his housekeeper, Madame de Brugnolle, to visit her. Madame de Chlendowska was there also, but he did not care for her especially, as she pretended to know too much about his intimacy with his "polar star." Madame de Bocarmé had one fault that annoyed him very much; she, too, was inclined to gossip about his association with Madame Hanska.

In 1843, Balzac erased from *Le Colonel Chabert* the dedication to M. de Custine, and replaced it by one to Madame la Comtesse Ida de Bocarmé, née du Chasteler.

One of the most attractive salons in Paris at the beginning of the Monarchy of July was that of Countess

Merlin, where all the celebrities met, especially the musicians. Born in Havana, the young, beautiful, rich and talented Madame Merlin added to the poetic grace of a Spaniard the wit and distinction of a French woman. General Merlin married her in Madrid in 1811, and brought her to Paris, where she created a sensation. Being an accomplished musician, she gave delightful concerts, and though also gifted as a writer she was as simple and unpretentious as if she had been created to remain obscure. In addition, she was so truly good that she had almost no enemies; her charity was inexhaustible, and she possessed one of those hearts which live only to do good and to love.

It was Balzac's good fortune to be introduced into this salon. He explained to Madame Hanska that he went there to play lansquenet in order to escape becoming insane! He was anxious to have Madame Merlin present at the first presentation of his *Quinola,* where she wished to have Martinez de la Rosa with her, but the novelist dissuaded her from this.

Madame Merlin was a friend of Madame de Girardin, and ridiculed the Princesse Belgiojoso when these two were rival candidates for the presidency of the new Academy that was being formed.

During Madame Hanska's secret visit to Paris in 1847, Balzac declined an invitation to dinner with Madame Merlin, excusing himself on the ground of lack of time, but promised to call upon her soon. A few months before this (1846), he dedicated to her *Les Marana,* a short story written in 1832. *Juana* is inscribed to her also.

As has been seen, Balzac frequently depicted the features, lives or peculiarities of various friends under altered names, but toward the close of *Béatrix* he laid aside all disguise in comparing the appearance of one of his famous women to the beauty of the Countess: "Madame Schontz owed her fame as a beauty to the brilliancy and color of a warm, creamy complexion like a creole's, a face full of original details, with the clean-cut, firm features, of which the Countess de Merlin was the most famous example and the most perennially young . . ."

In 1846, Balzac dedicated *Un Drame au Bord de la Mer,* written several years before, to Madame La Princesse Caroline Galitzin de Genthod, née Comtesse Walewska. Balzac doubtless met her while visiting Madame Hanska at Geneva in 1834, as she was living at Genthod. He met a Princesse Sophie Galitzin, whom he considered far more attractive, and later met another Princesse Galitzin. One of these ladies evidently aroused the suspicions of Madame Hanska, but the novelist assured her that there was no cause for her anxiety.

Another woman whom Balzac honored with a dedication of one of his books, but for whom he apparently cared little, was Madame la Baronne de Rothschild, wife of the founder of the banking house in Paris. Balzac had met Baron James de Rothschild and his wife at Aix, where she coquetted with him. He had business dealings with this firm, and planned, several years later, to present to Madame de Rothschild as a New Year's greeting some of his works handsomely bound; the volumes were de-

layed, and he accordingly made a change in some of his business matters, for this was evidently a gift with a motive. The dedication to her of *L'Enfant Maudit* in 1846, as well as that of *Un Homme d'Affaires* to her husband in 1845, was perhaps for financial reasons or favors, since he never seemed to care for the couple in society.

In the winter of 1837, Countess San-Severino Porcia wrote from Paris to her friend in Milan, the Countess Clara Maffei, that Balzac was coming to her city, and suggested that she receive him in her salon. This distinguished and cultured woman had visited the novelist in Paris, and had been much surprised at the kind of home in which he was living, how like a hermit he was secluded from the world and the persecutions of his creditors; she was amazed when he received her in his celebrated monastic robe.

The Countess Maffei retained her title after her marriage (in 1832) with the poet, Andrea Maffei, who was many years older than she. She was a great friend of the Princess Belgiojoso, and during the stirring times of 1848 the Princess had been a frequent visitor in her salon. Six years younger than the Princess, the Countess threw herself heart and soul into the political and literary life of Milan.

> " For fifty-two consecutive years (1834–1886) her salon was the rendezvous not merely of her compatriots but of intellectual Europe. The list of celebrities who thronged her modest drawing-room rivals that of Belgiojoso's Parisian salon, and includes many of the same immortal names. Daniel Stern, Balzac, Manzoni, Liszt, Verdi, and

a score of others, are of international fame; but the annals of Italian patriotism, belles-lettres and art teem with the names of men and women who, during that half century of uninterrupted hospitality, sought guidance, inspiration and intellectual entertainment among the politicians, poets, musicians and wits who congregated round the hostess." [33]

Balzac arrived in Milan in February, 1837, was well received, and was invited to the famous salon of Countess Maffei. The novelist was at once charmed with his hostess, whom he called *la petite Maffei,* and for whom he soon began to show a tender friendship which later became blended with affection.

Unfortunately Balzac did not like Milan; only the fascination of the Countess Maffei pleased him. He quarreled with the Princess San-Severino Porcia, who would not allow him to say anything unkind about Italy, and was depressed when calling on the Princess Bolognini, who laughed at him for it.

In the salon of the Countess Maffei the novelist preferred listening to talking; occasionally he would break out into sonorous laughter, and would then listen again, and — in spite of his excessive use of coffee — would fall asleep. The Countess was often embarrassed by Balzac's disdainful expressions about people he did not like but who were her friends. She tried to please him, however, and had many of her French-speaking friends to meet him, but he seemed most to enjoy tea with her alone. Referring to her age, he wrote in her album: "At twenty-three years of age, all is in the future." [34]

[33] W. R. Whitehouse, *A Revolutionary Princess,* pp. 278, 279.
[34] Raffaello Barbiera, *Il Salotto della Contessa Maffei.*

After Balzac's return to Paris he asked her, in response to one of her letters, to please ascertain why the Princess San-Severino was angry with him. Later, he showed his appreciation of her kindness by sending her the corrected proofs of *Martyres ignorés,* and by dedicating to her *La fausse Maîtresse,* published in 1841. The dedication, however, did not appear until several months later.

In a long and beautiful dedication, Balzac inscribed *Les Employés* to the Comtesse Serafina San-Severino, née Porcia, and to her brother, Prince Alfonso Serafino di Porcia, he dedicated *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes,* concerning which he thought a great deal while visiting in the latter's home in Milan. The hotel having become intolerable to the novelist, he was invited by Prince Porcia to occupy a little room in his home, overlooking the gardens, where he could work at his ease. The Prince, a man of about Balzac's age, was very much in love with the Countess Bolognini, and was unwilling to marry at all unless he could marry her, but her husband was still living. The Prince lived only ten doors from his Countess, and his happiness in seeing her so frequently, together with his riches, provoked gloomy meditations in the mind of the poor author, who was so far from his *Prédilecta,* so overcome with debts, and forced to work so hard.

To Madame la Comtesse Bolognini, née Vimercati, who was afterwards married to Prince Porcia, Balzac dedicated *Une Fille d'Eve:*

> "If you remember, madame, the pleasure your conversation gave to a certain traveler, making Paris live for him in Milan, you will not be surprised that he should lay

one of his works at your feet, as a token of gratitude for so many delightful evenings spent in your society, nor that he should seek for it the shelter of your name which, in old times, was given to not a few of the tales by one of your early writers, dear to the Milanese. You have a Eugénie, already beautiful, whose clever smile proclaims her to have inherited from you the most precious gifts a woman can possess, and whose childhood, it is certain, will be rich in all those joys which a sad mother refused to the Eugénie of these pages. If Frenchmen are accused of being frivolous and inconstant, I, you see, am Italian in my faithfulness and attachments. How often, as I wrote the name of Eugénie, have my thoughts carried me back to the cool stuccoed drawing-room and little garden of the *Viccolo dei Capuccini,* which used to resound to the dear child's merry laughter, to our quarrels, and our stories. You have left the *Corso* for the *Tre Monasteri,* where I know nothing of your manner of life, and I am forced to picture you, no longer amongst the pretty things, which doubtless still surround you, but like one of the beautiful heads of Raffaelle, Titian, Correggio or Allori, which, in their remoteness, seem to us like abstractions. If this book succeed in making its way across the Alps, it will prove to you the lively gratitude and respectful friendship of your humble servant,

"De Balzac."

LA PRINCESSE BAGRATION — LA COMTESSE BOSSI— MADAME KISSELEFF — LA PRINCESSE DE SCHÖNBURG — MADAME JAROSLAS POTOÇKA — LA BARONNE DE PFAFFINS — LA COMTESSE DELPHINE POTOÇKA

Several women whom Balzac knew, but who apparently had no special influence over his life, are mentioned

here; he evidently did not care enough for them or did not know them well enough to include their names in the dedicatory register of the *Comédie humaine*. This, however, by no means exhausts the list of his acquaintances among women. Many of them he had met through his intimacy with his "Polar Star"; he was indeed so popular that he once exclaimed to her that he was overwhelmed with Russian princesses and took to flight to avoid them.

The noted salon of the charming Princess Bagration, wife of the Russian field-marshal, was open to the novelist early in his career. With her aristocratic ease and the distinction of her manners, she had been one of the most brilliant stars at Vienna where her salon, as at Paris, was one of the most popular. Among her intimate friends was Madame Hamelin whom she had known during her stay in Vienna. Notwithstanding Balzac's careless habits of dress, he was welcome in this salon, where the ladies enjoyed the stories which he told with such charm, and at which he was always the first to laugh, though told against himself.

As has been mentioned, the Princess Bagration passed at Paris for the model of Fœdora. If M. Gabriel Ferry is correct, Balzac met the Duchesse de Castries in the salon of the Princess Bagration before their correspondence began, but never talked to her and did not suppose that he had attracted her attention.

One of Balzac's acquaintances whom he met during his visit to Madame Hanska at Geneva was the Countess Bossi. He met her again at Milan in 1838, on his return from his journey to Corsica, but he was not favorably impressed with her, although he once deemed it wise to

explain to his *Châtelaine* his conduct relative to her.

Madame Kisseleff was one of Madame Hanska's friends whom he probably met in Vienna; he dined at her home frequently and enjoyed her company, for she could talk to him of his *Louloup*. She was a friend of Madame Hamelin, and moved to Fontainebleau to be near her while the latter was living at *La Madeleine*. While living in Paris, Madame Kisseleff entertained Madame Hamelin and several other ladies together with Balzac; these dinners and his *visites de digestion* caused him to see much of her for awhile, but as in many of his other friendships, his ardor cooled later, and he went to her home only when especially invited. In 1844, she left Paris to reside at Homburg where she built a house. The novelist took advantage of her friendship to send articles to Madame Hanska through the Russian ambassador.

Balzac made *visites de politesse* to the Princesse de Schönburg, an acquaintance of Madame Hanska's, but no more than were required by courtesy. It would have been convenient for him to have seen much of her, had he cared to, for she had placed her child in the same house with him on account of its vicinity to the orthopædic hospital.

One of Madame Hanska's friends whom Balzac liked was Madame Jaroslas Potoçka, sister of the Countess Schouwaloff. She wrote some very pleasing letters to him, but he was too busy to answer them, so he sent her messages, or enclosed notes to her in his letters to his *Prédilecta*.

La Baronne de Pfaffins, née Comtesse Mierzciewska,

was a Polish lady whom Balzac met rather late in life. He first thought she was Madame Hanska's cousin, but later learned that it was to M. de Hanski that she was related. Her Polish voice reminded him so much of his *Louloup* that he was moved to tears; this friendship, however, did not continue long.

Another acquaintance from the land of Balzac's "Polar Star" was Madame Delphine Potoçka. She was the same Countess Delphine Potoçka who was a great friend of Chopin, to whom he dedicated some of his happiest inspirations, and whose voice he so loved that he requested her to sing while he was dying. Her box at the opera was near Balzac's so that he saw her frequently, and dined with her, but did not admire her.

MARIA — HÉLÈNE — LOUISE

"To Maria:

"May your name, that of one whose portrait is the noblest ornament of this work, lie on its opening page like a branch of sacred box, taken from an unknown tree, but sanctified by religion, and kept ever fresh and green by pious hands to protect the home.

"De Balzac."

Just who is the "Maria" to whom the dedication of *Eugénie Grandet* is addressed is a question that in the opinion of the present writer has never been satisfactorily answered. The generally accepted answer is that of Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, who thought that "Maria" was the girl whom Balzac described as a "poor, simple and delightful *bourgeoise,* . . . the most naïve creature that ever was, fallen like a flower from heaven," and who said

to Balzac: "Love me a year, and I will love you all my life." [35]

Even admitting that this much disputed letter of October 12, 1833, was written by Balzac, though it does not bear his signature, the name "Maria" does not appear in it, so it is no proof that she is the woman to whom Balzac dedicated one of his greatest and probably the most popular of his works, *Eugénie Grandet,* although the heroine has some of the characteristics of the woman referred to in that letter in that she is a "naïve, simple, and delightful *bourgeoise.*" But in reviewing the women to whom Balzac dedicated his stories in the *Comédie humaine,* one does not find any of this type. Either they are members of his family, old family friends, literary friends, rich people to whom he was indebted, women of the nobility, or women whom he loved for a time at least, and all were women whom he could respect and recognize in society, while the woman referred to in the letter of October 12, 1833, does not seem to have had this last qualification.

In reply to his sister Laure's criticism that there were too many millions in *Eugénie Grandet,* he insisted that the story was true, and that he could create nothing better than the truth. In investigating the truth of this story, it has been found that Jean Niveleau, a very rich man having many of the traits of Grandet, lived at Saumur, and that he had a beautiful daughter whom he is said to have refused to give in marriage to Balzac. Whether this be true or not, the novelist has screened some things of a personal nature in this work.

[35] *Un Roman d'Amour,* pp. 81, 82, 93.

Although the book is dated September, 1833, he did not finish it until later. It was just at this time that he met Madame Hanska, and visited her on two different occasions; during the period that he was working on *Eugénie Grandet.* As he was pressed for money, as usual, his *Prédilecta* offered to help him financially; this he refused, but immortalized the offer by having Eugénie give her gold to her lover.

In declining Madame Hanska's offer, he writes her:

> "Beloved angel, be a thousand times blessed for your drop of water, for your offer; it is everything to me and yet it is nothing. You see what a thousand francs would be when ten thousand a month are needed. If I could find nine, I could find twelve. But I should have liked, in reading that delightful letter of yours, to have plunged my hand into the sea and drawn out all its pearls to strew them on your beautiful black hair. . . . There is a sublime scene (to my mind, and I am rewarded for having it) in *Eugénie Grandet,* who offers her fortune to her cousin. The cousin makes an answer; what I said to you on that subject was more graceful. But to mingle a single word that I have said to my Eve in what others will read! — Ah! I would rather have flung *Eugénie Grandet* into the fire! . . . Do not think there was the least pride, the least false delicacy in my refusal of what you know of, the drop of gold you have put angelically aside. . . ." [36]

The novelist not only gave Madame Hanska the manuscript of *Eugénie Grandet,* but had her in mind while writing it: "One must love, my Eve, my dear one, to write

[36] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 66, 79, 81, October 29, November 12, 1833.

the love of *Eugénie Grandet,* a pure, immense, proud love!" [37]

The dedication of *Eugénie Grandet* to "Maria" did not appear until in 1839. Balzac knew several persons named "Marie." The present writer was at one time inclined to think that this Marie might have been the Countess Marie Potoçka, whom he met while writing *Eugénie,* but her cousin, the Princess Radziwill, says that she is sure she is not the one he had in mind, and that she was not the type of woman to whom Balzac would ever have dedicated a book. The novelist had dealings with Madame Marie Dorval, and in 1839, at the time the dedication was written, doubtless knew of her love for Jules Sandeau. Balzac knew also the Countess Marie d'Agoult, but she never would have inspired such a dedication.

Still another "Marie" with whom he was most intimate about 1839, is Madame Hélène-Marie-Félicité de Valette, and it will be remembered that while she was usually called "Hélène," "Marie" was Balzac's favorite name for her. But it is doubtful that he knew her when he wrote the book.

Yet Balzac's love was so fleeting that if he had had this "Maria" in mind in 1833 when he wrote *Eugénie,* he probably would have long since forgotten her by the time the dedication was made. It is a well known fact that Balzac dedicated many of his earlier books to friends that he did not meet until years later, and many dedications were not added until in 1842.

"To Hélène:

"The tiniest boat is not launched upon the sea without

[37] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 95, December 1, 1833.

the protection of some living emblem or revered name, placed upon it by the mariners. In accordance with this time-honored custom, Madame, I pray you to be the protectress of this work now launched upon our literary ocean; and may the imperial name which the Church has canonized and your devotion has doubly sanctified for me guard it from peril.

"De Balzac."

The identity of the enchantress who inspired this beautiful dedication of *Le Curé de Village* has been the subject of much speculation for students of Balzac. The author of the *Comédie humaine* knew the beautiful Hélène Zavadovsky as early as 1835, and, as has been seen, knew Madame Hélène de Valette in 1836.

The Princess Radziwill states that this "Hélène" was a sister of Madame Hanska, and that she died unmarried in 1842. She was much loved by all her family, and after the death of her mother in 1837 made her home with her sister Eve in Wierzschownia. The present author has found no mention of her in Balzac's letters in connection with *Le Curé de Village,* of which novel he speaks frequently, nor of his having known her personally, but since Balzac was continually twitting Madame Hanska about her pronunciation of various words, he was doubtless referring to her sister Hélène's Russian pronunciation when he writes: "From time to time, I recall to mind all the gowns I have seen you wear from the white and yellow one that first day at Peterhof (Petergoff, *idiome Hélène*), . . ." [38]

[38] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 326, March 4, 1844.

While Balzac evidently knew personally the women whom he had in mind in the dedications to "Maria" and to "Hélène,"— problems which have perplexed students of Balzac,— he found time for correspondence with a lady whom he never saw, and about whom he knew nothing beyond the Christian name "Louise." The twenty-three letters addressed to her bear no precise dates, but were written in 1836–1837.

Her first letter was sent to Balzac through his bookseller, who saw her seal; but Balzac allayed, without gratifying, his curiosity by assuring him that such letters came to him frequently. The writer was under the impression that Balzac's name was "Henry" and some of her correspondence was in English.

That he should have taken the time to write to this unknown correspondent shows that her letters must have possessed some intrinsic value for him, yet he refused to learn her identity.

> "Chance permitted me to know who you might be, and I refused to learn. I never did anything so chivalrous in my life; no, never! I consider it is grander than to risk one's life for an interview of ten minutes. Perhaps I may astonish you still more, when I say that I can learn all about you at any moment, any hour, and yet I refuse to learn, because you wish I should not know!"

In reply to a letter from Louise in which she complained that her time was monopolized by visits, he writes:

> "Visits! do they leave behind them any good for you? For the space of twelve years, an angelic woman stole

two hours each day from the world, from the claims of family, from all the entanglements and hindrances of Parisian life — two hours to spend them beside me — without any one else's being aware of the fact; for twelve years! Do you understand all that is contained in these words? I can not wish that this sublime devotedness which has been my salvation should be repeated. I desire that you should retain all your illusions about me without coming one step further; and I do not dare to wish that you should enter upon one of these glorious, secret, and above all, rare and exceptional relationships. Moreover, I have a few friends among women whom I trust — not more than two or three — but they are of an insatiable exigence, and if they were to discover that I corresponded with an *inconnue,* they would feel hurt." [39]

He revealed to her his ideas regarding women and friendship; how he longed to possess a tender affection which would be a secret between two alone. He complained of her want of confidence in him, and of his work in his loneliness. She tried to comfort him, and being artistic, sent him a sepia drawing. He sought a second one to hang on the other side of his fireplace, and thus replace two lithographs he did not like. As a token of his friendship, he sent her a manuscript of one of his works, saying:

"All this is suggested while looking at your sepia drawing; and while preparing a gift, precious in the sight of those who love me, and of which I am chary, I refuse it to all who have not deeply touched my heart, or who

[39] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 48–67. The woman Balzac refers to here is Madame de Berny, but this is an exaggeration.

have not done me a service; it is a thing of no value, except where there is heartfelt friendship." [40]

During his imprisonment by order of the National Guard, she sent him flowers, for which he was very profuse in expressing his thanks. He appreciated especially the roses which came on his birthday, and wished her as many tender things as there were scents in the blooming buds.

She apparently had some misfortune, and their correspondence terminated abruptly in this, his last letter to her:

"*Carina,* . . . On my return from a long and difficult journey, undertaken for the refreshment of my over-tired brain, I find this letter from you, very concise, and melancholy enough in its solitude; it is, however, a token of your remembrance. That you may be happy is the wish of my heart, a very pure and disinterested wish, since you have decided that thus it is to be. I once more take up my work, and in that, as in a battle, the struggle occupies one entirely; one suffers, but the heart becomes calm."

*Facine Cane* was dedicated to Louise:

"As a mark of affectionate gratitude."

[40] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 59–67.

# CHAPTER V

## SENTIMENTAL FRIENDSHIPS

### MADAME DE BERNY

"I have to stand alone now amidst my troubles; formerly I had beside me in my struggles the most courageous and the sweetest person in the world, a woman whose memory is each day renewed in my heart, and whose divine qualities make all other friendships when compared with hers seem pale. I no longer have help in the difficulties of life; when I am in doubt about any matter, I have now no other guide than this fatal thought, 'If she were alive, what would she say?' Intellects of this order are rare." [1]

Balzac loved to seek the sympathy and confidence of people whose minds were at leisure, and who could interest themselves in his affairs. With his artistic temperament, he longed for the refinement, society and delicate attentions which he found in the friendships of various women. "The feeling of abandonment and of solitude in which I am stings me. There is nothing selfish in me; but I need to tell my thoughts, my efforts, my feelings to a being who is not myself; otherwise I have no strength. I should wish for no crown if there were no feet at which to lay that which men may put upon my head." [2]

[1] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 142, 1839. Letter to Madame Surville.

[2] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 348, October, 1836.

One of the first of these friendships was that formed with Madame de Berny, née (Laure-Louise-Antoinette) Hinner. She was the daughter of a German musician, a harpist at the court of Louis XVI, and of Louise-Marguerite-Émélie Quelpec de Laborde, a lady in waiting at the court of Marie Antoinette. M. Hinner died in 1784, after which Madame Hinner was married to François-Augustin Reinier de Jarjayes, adjutant-general of the army. M. Jarjayes was one of the best known persons belonging to the Royalist party during the Revolution, a champion of the Queen, whom he made many attempts to save. He was one of her most faithful friends, was intrusted with family keepsakes, and was made lieutenant-general under Louis XVIII. Madame Jarjayes was much loved by the Queen; she was also implicated in the plots. Before dying, Marie Antoinette sent her a lock of her hair and a pair of earrings. Laure Hinner was married April 8, 1793, to M. Gabriel de Berny, almost nine years her senior, who was of the oldest nobility. Madame de Berny, her husband, her mother and her stepfather were imprisoned for nine months, and were not released until after the fall of Robespierre.

The married life of Madame de Berny was unhappy; she was intelligent and sentimental; he, capricious and morose. She seems to have realized the type of the *femme incomprise;* she too was an *étrangère,* and bore some traits of her German origin. Coming into Balzac's life at about the age of forty, this *femme de quarante ans* became for him the *amie* and the companion who was to teach him life. Still beautiful, having been reared in intimate court circles, having been the confidante of plotters

and the guardian of secrets, possessed of rare trinkets and souvenirs — what an open book was this *mémoire vivante,* and with what passion did the young interrogator absorb the pages! Here he found unknown anecdotes, ignored designs, and here the sources of his great plots, *Les Chouans, Madame de la Chanterie,* and *Un Episode sous la Terreur.*

All this is what she could teach him, aided perhaps by her mother, who lived until 1837. Here is the secret of Balzac's royalism; here is where he first learned of the great ladies that appear in his work, largely portrayed to him by the *amie* who watched over his youth and guided his maturity.

Having consulted the *Almanach des 25,000 adresses,* Madame Ruxton thinks that Balzac met Madame de Berny when the two families lived near each other in Paris; M. de Berny and family spent the summers in Villeparisis, and resided during the winters at 3, rue Portefoin, Paris. It is possible that he met her at the soirées, which he frequented with his sisters, and where his awkwardness provoked smiles from the ladies. While it is generally supposed that they met at Villeparisis, MM. Hanotaux et Vicaire also believed that they must have known each other before this, if Balzac is referring to his own life in *Oeuvres diverses: Une Passion au Collège.*

Madame de Berny is first mentioned in Balzac's correspondence in 1822 when, in writing his sister Laure the general news, he informs her that Madame de Berny has become a grandmother, and that after forty years of reflection, realizing that money is everything, she has in-

vested in grain. But he must have met her some time before this, for his family was living in Villeparisis as early as 1819.

M. de Berny bought in 1815 the home of M. Michaud de Montzaigle in Villeparisis, and remained possessor of it until 1825. M. Parquin, the present owner of this home, is a Balzacien who has collected all the traditions remaining in Villeparisis concerning the two families. According to Villeparisis tradition, Madame de Berny was a woman of great intelligence who wrote much, and her notes and stories were not only utilized by Balzac, but she was his collaborator, especially in writing the *Physiologie du Mariage* and the first part of the *Femme de trente Ans.*

When Balzac went to Villeparisis to reside, he became tutor to his brother Henri, and it was arranged that he should also give lessons to one of the sons of M. and Madame de Berny. Thus Balzac probably saw her daily and was struck by her patience and kindness toward her husband. She was apparently a gentle and sympathetic woman who understood Balzac as did no one else, and who ignored her own troubles and sufferings for fear of grieving him in the midst of his struggles.

It was owing to the strong recommendation of M. de Berny, councilor at the Court at Paris, that Balzac obtained in the spring of 1826 his royal authorization to establish himself as a printer. During the year 1825–1826, Madame de Berny loaned Balzac 9250 francs; after his failure, she entered in *name* into the type-foundry association of Laurent et Balzac. She advanced to Balzac a total of 45,000 francs, and established her son, Alex-

andre de Berny, in the house where her protégé had been unsuccessful.

Though Balzac states that he paid her in full, he can not be relied upon when he is dealing with figures, and MM. Hanotaux et Vicaire question this statement in relating the incident told by M. Arthur Rhoné, an old friend of the de Berny family. M. de Berny told M. Rhoné that the famous bust of Flore cost him 1500 francs. One day while visiting Balzac, his host told him to take whatever he liked as a reimbursement, since he could not pay him. M. de Berny took some trifle, and after Balzac's death, M. Charles Tuleu, knowing his fondness for the bust of Flore, brought it to him as a souvenir of their common friend. This might explain also why M. de Berny possessed a superb clock and other things coming from Balzac's collection.[3]

It was while Balzac was living in a little apartment in the rue des Marais that his *Dilecta* began her daily visits, which continued so long, and which made such an impression on him.[4]

Madame de Berny was of great help to Balzac in the social world and was perhaps instrumental in developing the friendship between him and the Duchesse de Castries. It was the Duc de Fitz-James who asked Balzac (1832) to write a sort of program for the Royalist party, and later (1834), wished him to become a candidate for deputy. This Duc de Fitz-James was the nephew of the

[3] *La Jeunesse de Balzac,* pp. 46, 47. For details of the financial dealings between Madame de Berny and Balzac, see this admirable work which has been freely used.

[4] Madame Ruxton, *La Dilecta de Balzac,* p. 97. Many details concerning Madame de Berny have been taken from this excellent work.

godmother of Madame de Berny. It was to please him and the Duchesse de Castries that Balzac published a beautiful page about the Duchesse d'Angoulême.

Although Madame de Berny was of great help to Balzac in the financial and social worlds, of greater value was her literary influence over him. With good judgment and excellent taste she writes him: "Act, my dear, as though the whole multitude sees you from all sides at the height where you will be placed, but do not cry to it to admire you, for, on all sides, the strongest magnifying glasses will instantly be turned on you, and how does the most delightful object appear when seen through the microscope?"

She had had great experience in life, had suffered much and had seen many cruel things, but she brought Balzac consolation for all his pains and a confidence and serenity of which his appreciation is beautifully expressed:

> "I should be most unjust if I did not say that from 1823 to 1833 an angel sustained me through that horrible struggle. Madame de Berny, though married, was like a God to me. She was a mother, friend, family, counselor; she made the writer, she consoled the young man, she created his taste, she wept like a sister, she laughed, she came daily, like a beneficent sleep, to still his sorrows. She did more; though under the control of a husband, she found means to lend me as much as forty-five thousand francs, of which I returned the last six thousand in 1836, with interest at five per cent., be it understood. But she never spoke to me of my debt, except now and then; without her, I should, assuredly, be dead. She often

divined that I had eaten nothing for days; she provided for all with angelic goodness; she encouraged that pride which preserves a man from baseness,— for which to-day my enemies reproach me, calling it a silly satisfaction in myself — the pride that Boulanger has, perhaps, pushed to excess in my portrait." [5]

Balzac's conception of woman was formed largely from his association with Madame de Berny in his early manhood, and a reflection of these ideas is seen throughout his works. It was probably to give Madame de Berny pleasure that he painted the mature beauties which won for him so many feminine admirers.

It is doubtless Madame de Berny whom Balzac had in mind when in *Madame Firmiani* he describes the heroine:

"Have you ever met, for your happiness, some woman whose harmonious tones give to her speech the charm that is no less conspicuous in her manners, who knows how to talk and to be silent, who cares for you with delicate feeling, whose words are happily chosen and her language pure? Her banter caresses you, her criticism does not sting; she neither preaches nor disputes, but is interested in leading a discussion, and stops at the right moment. Her manner is friendly and gay, her politeness is unforced, her earnestness is not servile; she reduces respect to a mere gentle shade; she never tires you, and leaves you satisfied with her and yourself. You will see her gracious presence stamped on the things she collects about her. In her home everything charms the eye, and you breathe, as it seems, your native air. This woman is quite natural. You never feel an effort, she flaunts noth-

[5] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 418, July 19, 1837.

ing, her feelings are expressed with simplicity because they are genuine. Though candid, she never wounds the most sensitive pride; she accepts men as God made them, pitying the vicious, forgiving defects and absurdities, sympathizing with every age, and vexed with nothing because she has the tact of foreseeing everything. At once tender and gay, she first constrains and then consoles you. You love her so truly that if this angel does wrong, you are ready to justify her. Such was Madame Firmiani."

It was to Madame de Berny's son, Alexandre, that Balzac dedicated *Madame Firmiani,* and he no doubt recognized the portrait.

Balzac often portrayed his own life and his association with women in his works. In commenting on *La Peau de Chagrin,* he writes:

"Pauline is a real personage for me, only more lovely than I could describe her. If I have made her a dream, it is because I did not wish my secret to be discovered." [6]

And again, in writing of *Louis Lambert:*

"You know when you work in tapestry, each stitch is a thought. Well, each line in this new work has been for me an abyss. It contains things that are secrets between it and me." [7]

In portraying the yearnings and sufferings of Louis Lambert (*Louis Lambert*), of Félix de Vandenesse (*Le*

[6] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 241, October 5, 1831. Letter to the Duchesse de Castries.

[7] *Ibid.,* v. 1, p. 347, January 25, 1833. Letter to Madame Carraud.

*Lys dans la Vallée*) and of Raphael (*La Peau de Chagrin*), Balzac is picturing his own life. Pauline de Villenoix (*Louis Lambert*) and Pauline Gaudin (*La Peau de Chagrin*) are possibly drawn from the same woman and have many characteristics of Madame de Berny. Madame de Mortsauf (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*) is Pauline, though not so outspoken. Then, is it not *La Dilecta* whom the novelist had in mind when Louis Lambert writes:

> "When I lay my head on your knees, I could wish to attract to you the eyes of the whole world, just as I long to concentrate in my love every idea, every power within me";

and near the end of life, could not Madame de Berny say as did Pauline in the closing lines of *Louis Lambert:*

> "His heart was mine; his genius is with God"?

The year 1832 was a critical one in the private life of Balzac. Madame de Berny, more than twenty years his senior, felt that they should sever their close connection and remain as friends only. Balzac's family had long been opposed to this intimate relationship and had repeatedly tried to find a rich wife for him. Madame de Castries, who had begun an anonymous correspondence with him, revealed her identity early in that year, and the first letter from l'Étrangère, who was soon to over-shadow all his other loves, arrived February 28, 1832. During the same period Mademoiselle de Trumilly rejected his hand. With so many distractions, Balzac probably did not suffer from this separation as did his *Dilecta.* But he never forgot her, and constantly compared other women

with her, much to their detriment. He regarded her, indeed, as a woman of great superiority.

In June (1832), Balzac left Paris to spend several weeks with his friends, M. and Mme. de Margonne, and there at their château de Saché, he wrote *Louis Lambert* as a sort of farewell of soul to soul to the woman he had so loved, and whose equal in devotion he never found. In memory of his ten years' intimacy with her, he dedicated this work to her: *Et nunc et semper dilectae dicatum 1822–1832.* It is to her also, that he gave the beautiful Devéria portrait, resplendent with youth and strength.[8]

M. Brunetière has suggested that the woman whose traits best recall Madame de Berny is Marguerite Claës, the victim in *La Recherche de l'Absolu,* while the nature of Balzac's affection for this great friend of his youth has not been better expressed than in Balthasar Claës, she always ready to sacrifice all for him, and he, as Balthasar, always ready, in the interest of his "grand work," to rob her and make her desperate while loving her. However, Balzac states, in speaking of Madame de Berny:

> "At any moment death may take from me an angel who has watched over me for fourteen years; she, too, a flower of solitude, whom the world had never touched, and who has been my star. My work is not done without tears! The attentions due to her cast uncertainty upon any time of which I could dispose, though she herself unites with the doctor in advising me some strong

[8] MM. Hanotaux et Vicaire, *op. cit.,* p. 49, think that it is Madame de Berny who was weighing on Balzac's soul when he relates, in *Le Curé de Village,* the tragic story of the young workman who dies from love without opening his lips.

diversions. She pushes friendship so far as to hide her sufferings from me; she tries to seem well for me. You understand that I have not drawn Claës to do as he! Great God! what changes in her have been wrought in two months! I am overwhelmed." [9]

M. Le Breton has suggested that Madame de Berny is Catherine in *La Dernière Fée,* Madame d'Aiglemont in *La Femme de trente Ans,* and Madame de Beauséant in *La Femme abandonnée,* and has strengthened this last statement by pointing out that Gaston de Nueil came to Madame de Beauséant after she had been deserted by her lover, the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto, just as the youthful Balzac came to Madame de Berny after she had had a lover.

It is doubtless to this friendship that Balzac refers when he writes in the last lines of *La Duchesse de Langeais:* "It is only the last love of a woman that can satisfy the first love of a man." It is of interest to note that Antoinette is the Christian name of the heroine of this story. Throughout the *Comédie humaine* are seen quite young men who fall in love with women well advanced in years, as Calyste de Guénic with Mademoiselle Félicité des Touches in *Béatrix,* and Lucien de Rubempré with Madame Bargeton in *Illusions perdues.*

In *Eugénie Grandet* Balzac writes:

"Do you know what Madame Campam used to say to us? 'My children, so long as a man is a Minister, adore him; if he falls, help to drag him to the ditch. Powerful,

[9] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 220, December 22, 1834. Madame Claës bears many of the characteristics of Madame de Berny in her silent suffering.

he is a sort of deity; ruined, he is below Marat in his sewer, because he is alive, and Marat, dead. Life is a series of combinations, which must be studied and followed if a good position is to be successfully maintained.'"

Since Madame Campan was *femme de chambre* of Marie Antoinette, Balzac probably heard this maxim through Madame de Berny.

Although some writers state that Madame de Berny was one of Balzac's collaborators in composing the *Physiologie du Mariage,* he says, regarding this work: "I undertook the *Physiologie du Mariage* and the *Peau de Chagrin* against the advice of that angel whom I have lost." [10] She may have inspired him, however, in writing *Le Curé de Tours,* as it is dated at her home, Saint-Firmin, 1832.

In 1833 Balzac wrote Madame Hanska that he had dedicated the fourth volume of the *Scènes de la Vie privée* to her, putting her seal at the head of *l'Expiation,* the last chapter of *La Femme de trente Ans,* which he was writing at the moment he received her first letter. But a person who was as a mother to him and whose caprices and even jealousy he was bound to respect, had exacted that this silent testimony should be suppressed. He had the sincerity to avow to her both the dedication and its destruction, because he believed her to have a soul sufficiently lofty not to desire homage which would cause grief to one as noble and grand as she whose child he was, for she had rescued him when in youth he had nearly perished in the

[10] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 469, March 26, 1836.

midst of griefs and shipwreck. He had saved the only copy of that dedication, for which he had been blamed as if it were a horrible coquetry, and wished her to keep it as a souvenir and as an expression of his thanks.

Balzac was ever loyal to Madame de Berny and refused to reveal her baptismal name to Madame Hanska; soon after their correspondence began he wrote her: "You have asked me the baptismal name of the *Dilecta*. In spite of my complete and blind faith, in spite of my sentiment for you, I cannot tell it to you; I have never told it. Would you have faith in me if I told it? No." [11]

After 1834 Madame de Berny's health failed rapidly, and her last days were full of sorrow. Among her numerous family trials Balzac enumerates:

> "One daughter become insane, another daughter dead, the third dying, what blows! — And a wound more violent still, of which nothing can be told. Finally, after thirty years of patience and devotion, forced to separate from her husband under pain of dying if she remained a few days longer. All this in a short space of time. This is what I suffer through the heart that created me. . . . Madame de Berny is much better; she has borne a last shock, the illness of a beloved son whose brother has gone to bring him home from Belgium. . . . Suddenly, the only son who resembles her, a young man handsome as the day, tender and spiritual like herself, like her full of noble sentiments, fell ill, and ill of a cold which amounts to an affection of the lungs. The only child out of *nine* with whom she can sympathize! Of the nine, only four remain; and her youngest daughter has become hysterically insane, without any hope of cure. That blow

[11] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 16, March, 1833.

nearly killed her. I was correcting the *Lys* beside her; but my affection was powerless even to temper this last blow. Her son (twenty-three years old) was in Belgium, where he was directing an establishment of great importance. His brother Alexandre went for him, and he arrived a month ago, in a deplorable condition. This mother, without strength, almost expiring, sits up at night to nurse Armand. She has nurses and doctors. She implores me not to come and not to write to her." [12]

Some secret pertaining to Madame de Berny remains untold. In 1834 Balzac writes Madame Hanska: "The greatest sorrows have overwhelmed Madame de Berny. She is far from me, at Nemours, where she is dying of her troubles. I cannot write you about them; they are things that can only be spoken of with the greatest secrecy." He might have revealed this secret to her in 1835 when he visited her in Vienna; the following secret, however, is not explained in subsequent letters, and Balzac did not see

[12] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 187, 278, 282, August 25, 1834, October, 1835, November 22, 1835. Various writers in speaking of Madame de Berny, state that she had eight children; others, nine. Balzac remarks frequently that she had nine. Among others, Madame Ruxton says that she had eight. She gives their names and dates of birth. The explanation of this difference is probably found in the following: "I am going to fulfil a rather sad duty this morning. The daughter of Madame de B . . . and of Campi . . . asks for me. In 1824, they wished me to marry her. She was bewitchingly beautiful, a flower of Bengal! After twenty years, I am going to see her again! At forty years of age! She asks a service of me; doubtless a literary ambition! . . . I am going there. . . . Three o'clock. I was sure of it! I have seen Julie, to whom and for whom I wrote the verses: 'From the midst of those torrents of glory and of light, etc.:' which are in *Illusions perdues. . . .*" *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 331, March 16, 17, 1844. Neither the name *Julie* nor the date of her birth is given by Madame Ruxton.

Madame Hanska again until seven years later, in St. Petersburg:

"I have much distress, even enormous distress in the direction of Madame de Berny; not from her directly, but from her family. It is not of a nature to be written. Some evening at Wierzchownia, when the heart wounds are scars, I will tell it to you in murmurs so that the spiders cannot hear, and so that my voice can go from my lips to your heart. They are dreadful things, which dig into life to the bone, deflowering all, and making one distrust all, except you for whom I reserve these sighs." [13]

Though Madame de Berny may have been jealous of other women in her earlier association with Balzac, she evidently changed later, for he writes:

"Alas! Madame de Berny is no better. The malady makes frightful progress, and I cannot express to you how grand, noble and touching this soul of my life has been in these days measured by illness, and with what fervor she desires that another be to me what she has been. She knows the inward spring and nobility that the habit of carrying all things to an idol gives me. My God is on earth." [14]

Contrary to his family, Madame Carraud sympathized with Balzac in his devotion to Madame de Berny, and invited them to be her guests. In accepting he writes:

"Her life is so much bound up in mine! Ah, no one

[13] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 161, June 3, 1834, pp. 323, 324, April 30, 1836.

[14] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 231, February 10, 1835.

can form any true idea of this deep attachment which sustains me in all my work, and consoles me every moment in all I suffer. You can understand something of this, you who know so well what friendship is, you who are so affectionate, so good. . . . I thank you beforehand for your offer of Frapesle to her. There, amid your flowers, and in your gentle companionship, and the country life, if convalescence is possible, and I venture to hope for it, she will regain life and health." [15]

He apparently did not receive such sympathy from Madame Hanska in their early correspondence:

"Why be displeased about a woman fifty-eight years old, who is a mother to me, who folds me in her heart and protects me from stings? Do not be jealous of her; she would be so glad of our happiness. She is an angel, sublime. There are angels of earth and angels of heaven; she is of heaven." [16]

Madame de Berny's illness continued to grow more and more serious. The reading of the second number of *Père Goriot* affected her so much that she had another heart attack. But as her illness and griefs changed and withered her, Balzac's affection for her redoubled. He did not realize how rapidly she was failing, for she did not wish him to see her unless she felt well and could appear attractive. On his return to France from a journey to Italy with Madame Marbouty, he was overcome with grief at the news of the death of Madame de Berny. He found on his table a letter from her son Alexandre briefly announcing his mother's death.

[15] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, p. 387, December, 1833.
[16] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 37, August, 1833.

But the novelist did not cease to respect her criticism:

"I resumed my work this morning; I am obeying the last words that Madame de Berny wrote me; 'I can die; I am sure that you have upon your brow the crown I wished there. The *Lys* is a sublime work, without spot or flaw. Only, the death of Madame de Mortsauf does not need those horrible regrets; they injure the beautiful letter she writes.' Therefore, to-day I have piously effaced a hundred lines, which, according to many persons, disfigure that creation. I have not regretted a single word, and each time that my pen was drawn through one of them, never was heart of man more deeply stirred. I thought I saw that grand and sublime woman, that angel of friendship, before me, smiling as she smiled to me when I used a strength so rare,— the strength to cut off one's own limb and feel neither pain nor regret in correcting, in conquering one's self." [17]

Balzac was sincere in his friendship with Madame de Berny, and never ceased to revere her memory. The following appreciations of her worth are a few of the numerous beautiful tributes he has paid her:

"I have lost the being whom I love most in the world. . . . She whom I have lost was more than a mother, more than a friend, more than any human creature can be to another; it can only be expressed by the word *divine*. She sustained me through storms of trouble by word and deed and entire devotedness. If I am alive this day, it is to her that it is due. She was everything to me; and although during the last two years, time and illness kept us apart, we saw each other through the distance. She

[17] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 376, January 15, 1837.

inspired me; she was for me a spiritual sun. Madame de Mortsauf in *Le Lys dans la Vallée,* only faintly shadows forth some of the slighter qualities of this woman; there is but a very pale reflection of her, for I have a horror of unveiling my own private emotions to the public, and nothing personal to myself will ever be known." [18]

"Madame de Berny is dead. I can say no more on that point. My sorrow is not of a day; it will react upon my whole life. For a year I had not seen her, nor did I see her in her last moments. . . . *She,* who was always so lovingly severe to me, acknowledged that the *Lys* was one of the finest books in the French language; she decked herself at last with the crown which, fifteen years earlier, I had promised her, and, always coquettish, she imperiously forbade me to visit her, because she would not have me near her unless she were beautiful and well. The letter deceived me. . . . When I was wrecked the first time, in 1828, I was only twenty-nine years old and I had an angel at my side. . . . There is a blank which has saddened me. The adored is here no longer. Every day I have occasion to deplore the eternal absence. Would you believe that for six months I have not been able to go to Nemours to bring away the things that ought to be in my sole possession? Every week I say to myself, 'It shall be this week! . . .' I was very unhappy in my youth, but Madame de Berny balanced all by an absolute devotion, which was understood to its full extent only when the grave had seized its prey. Yes, I was spoiled by that angel." [19]

So faithful was Balzac to the memory of his *Dilecta*

[18] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 65. Letter to Louise.

[19] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 340, 341, August 22, 1836, p. 346, December 30, 1836, p. 376, January 15, 1837, p. 485, August 8, 1838. Madame de Berny died July 27, 1836.

that nine years after her death, he was deeply affected on seeing at the *Cour d'Assises* a woman about forty-five years of age, who strongly resembled Madame de Berny, and who was being arraigned for deeds caused by her devotion to a reckless youth.

### LA DUCHESSE DE CASTRIES.— MADEMOISELLE DE TRUMILLY

"He who has not seen, at some ball of Madame, Duchesse de Berry, glide airy, scarcely touching the floor, so moving that one perceived in her only grace before knowing whether she was a beauty, a young woman with blond, deep-golden hair; he who has not seen appear then the young Marquise de Castries in a fête, cannot, without doubt, form an idea of this new beauty, charming, aerial, praised and honored in the salons of the Restoration." [20]

Balzac had a brief, yet ardent friendship with the Duchesse de Castries which ended so unhappily for him that one might say: "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned." [21] Madame de Castries was the daughter of the Duchesse (née Fitz-James) and the Duc de Maillé. She did not become a duchess until in 1842, and bore the title of marquise previous to that time. Separated from her husband as the result of a famous love affair, the Marquise gathered round her a group of intellectual people, among whom were the writers Balzac, Musset, Sainte-Beuve, etc., and continued active in literary and artistic circles until her death (1861).

[20] Docteur Véron, *Memoires d'un Bourgeois à Paris,* v. 6, p. 244.
[21] Congreve, *The Mourning Bride,* Act III, Scene 2.

On Balzac's return to Paris after a prolonged visit with his friends at Saché during the month of September, 1831, he received an anonymous letter, dated at Paris, a circumstance which was with him of rather frequent occurrence, as with many men of letters.

This lady criticized the *Physiologie du Mariage,* to which Balzac replies, defending his position:

"The *Physiologie du Mariage,* madame, was a work undertaken for the purpose of defending the cause of women. I knew that if, with the view of inculcating ideas favorable to their emancipation and to a broad and thorough system of education for them, I had gone to work in a blundering way, I should at best, have been regarded as nothing more than an author of a theory more or less plausible. I was therefore, obliged to clothe my ideas, to disguise them under a new shape, in biting, incisive words that should lay hold on the mind of my readers, awaken their attention and leave behind, reflections upon which they might meditate. Thus then any woman who has passed through the 'storms of life' would see that I attribute the blame of all faults committed by the wives, entirely to their husbands. It is, in fact, a plenary absolution. Besides this, I plead for the natural and inalienable rights of woman. A happy marriage is impossible unless there be a perfect acquaintance between the two before marriage — a knowledge of each other's ways, habits and character. And I have not flinched from any of the consequences involved in this principle. Those who know me are aware that I have been faithful to this opinion ever since I reached the age of reason; and in my eyes a young girl who has committed a fault deserves more interest than she who, remain-

ing ignorant, lies open to the misfortunes of the future. I am at this present time a bachelor, and if I should marry later in life, it will only be to a widow." [22]

Thus was begun the correspondence, and the Duchess ended by lifting her mask and inviting the writer to visit her; he gladly accepted her gracious offer to come, not as a literary man nor as an artist, but as himself. It is a striking coincidence that Balzac accepted this invitation the very day, February 28, 1832, that he received the first letter from *l'Étrangère*.

What must have been Balzac's surprise, and how flattered he must have felt, on learning that his unknown correspondent belonged to the highest aristocracy of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and that her husband was a peer of France under Charles X!

"Madame de Castries was a coquettish, vain, delicate, clever woman, with a touch of sensibility, piety and *chaleur de salon;* a true Parisian with all her brilliant exterior accomplishments, qualities refined by education, luxury and aristocratic surroundings, but also with all her coldness and faults; in a word, one of those women of whom one must never ask friendship, love or devotion beyond a light veneer, because nature has created some women morally poor." [23]

At first, Balzac was too enraptured to judge her accurately, but after frequenting her salon for several months, he says of her:

"It is necessary that I go and climb about at Aix, in

[22] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 237, October 5, 1831.
[23] Gabriel Ferry, *Balzac et ses Amies,* p. 81, 82.

Savoy, to run after some one who, perhaps, will laugh at me — one of those aristocratic women of whom you no doubt have a horror; one of those angelic beauties to whom one ascribes a soul; a true duchess, very disdainful, very loving, subtle, witty, a coquette, like nothing I have ever yet seen, and who says she loves me, who wants to keep me in a palace at Venice (for I tell you everything), and who desires I should write nothing, except for her; one of those women who must be worshiped on one's knees when they wish it, and whom one has such pleasure in conquering; a woman to be dreamt of, jealous of everything."

A few weeks later he writes from Aix:

"I have come here to seek at once both much and little. Much, because I see daily a person full of grace and amiability, little, because she is never likely to love me." [24]

Under the influence of the Duchesse de Castries and the Duc de Fitz-James, Balzac gave more and more prominence to Catholic and Legitimist sentiments; and it was perhaps for her sake that the novelist offered himself as a candidate for deputy in several districts, but was defeated in all of them. He thought it quite probable that the Duc de Fitz-James would be elected in at least two districts, so if he were not elected at Angoulême, the Duke might use his interest to get him elected for the place he declined.

It is after Balzac met Madame de Castries that one notes his extravagant tastes and love of display as shown

[24] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, pp. 265, 306, July 2, 1832, September, 1832. Letters to Madame Carraud.

in his horses and carriage, his extra servant, his numerous waistcoats, his gold buttons, his appearance at the opera with his wonderful cane, and his indulgence in rare pictures, old furniture, and bric-à-brac in general.

Induced to follow her to Aix, he continued his work, rising at five in the morning and working until half past five in the afternoon. His lunch came from the circle, and at six o'clock, he dined with Madame de Castries, and spent the evening with her. His intimacy with this illustrious family increased, and he accepted an invitation to accompany them to Italy, giving several reasons for this journey:

> "I am at the gates of Italy, and I fear to give way to the temptation of passing through them. The journey would not be costly; I could make it with the Fitz-James family, who would be exceedingly agreeable; they are all perfect to me. . . . I travel as fourth passenger in Mme. de Castries' *vetturino* and the bargain — which includes everything, food, carriages, hotels — is a thousand francs for all of us to go from Geneva to Rome; making my share two hundred and fifty francs. . . . I shall make this splendid journey with the Duke, who will treat me as if I were his son. I also shall be in relation with the best society; I am not likely to meet with such an opportunity again. M. de Fitz-James has been in Italy before, he knows the country, and will spare me all loss of time. Besides this, his name will throw open many doors to me. The Duchesse and he are both more than kind to me, in every way, and the advantages of their society are great." [25]

[25] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 1, pp. 309, 315, 316, September 15, 23, 1832. Letters to Madame Surville and Madame de Balzac.

From Aix they went to Geneva. Just what happened here, we shall probably never know. Suddenly abandoning the proposed trip, Balzac writes his mother:

"It is advisable I should return to France for three months. . . . Besides, my traveling companions will not be at Naples till February. I shall, therefore, come back, but not to Paris; my return will not be known to any one; and I shall start again for Naples in February, via Marseilles and the steamer. I shall be more at rest on the subjects of money and literary obligations." [26]

Later he alludes thus to his sudden departure from Geneva:

"*Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu!* God, in whom I believe, owed me some sweet emotions at the sight of Geneva, for I left it disconsolate, cursing everything, abhorring womankind! With what joy shall I return to it, my celestial love, my Eva!" [27]

Thus was ended an ardent friendship of about eight months' duration, for instead of rejoining the Duchesse de Castries in Italy Balzac's first visit to that country was made many years later, and then in the delightful company of his "Polar Star."

In speaking of this sudden breach, Miss M. F. Sandars says:

"We can only conjecture the cause of the final rupture, as no satisfactory explanation is forthcoming. The original 'Confession' in the *Médecin de Campagne,* which is the history of Balzac's relations and parting with Ma-

[26] *Op. cit.,* v. 1, p. 341, October, 1832.
[27] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 93, November 23, 1833.

dame de Castries, is in the possession of the Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul. The present 'Confession' was substituted for it, because the first revealed too much of Balzac's private life. However, even in the original 'Confession,' we learn no reason for Madame de Castries' sudden resolve to dismiss her adorer, as Balzac declares with indignant despair that he can give no explanation of it. Apparently she parted from him one evening with her usual warmth of affection, and next morning everything was changed, and she treated him with the utmost coldness." [28]

Fully to appreciate what this friendship meant to both, one must consider the private life of each. As has been seen, it was in the summer of 1832 that Balzac and his *Dilecta* decided to sever their intimate connection, and since his *Châtelaine* of Wierzchownia had not yet become the dominating force in his life, his heart was doubtless yearning for some one to adore.

There was also an aching void in the heart of Madame de Castries. She, too, was recovering from an amorous attachment, more serious than was his, for death had recently claimed the young Count Metternich. Perhaps, then, each was seeking consolation in the other's society.

There was nothing more astonishing or charming than to see in the evening, in one of the most simple little drawing-rooms, antiquely furnished with tables, cushions of old velvet and screens of the eighteenth century, this woman, her spine injured, reclining in her invalid's chair, languid, but without affectation. This woman — with her profile more Roman than Greek, her hair falling over

[28] *Honoré de Balzac*, p. 122.

her high, white brow — was the Duchesse de Castries, née de Maillé, related to the best families of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Accompanying the young Comte de Metternich on the hunt, she was caught in the branch of a tree, and fell, injuring her spine. But a shadow of her former brilliant self — such had become this beauty, once so dazzling that the moment she entered the drawing-room, her gorgeous robe falling over shoulders worthy of a Titian, the brilliancy of the candles was literally effaced.[29]

Balzac refers frequently to Count Metternich in writing to Madame Hanska of his association with Madame de Castries:

> "There is still a Metternich in this adventure; but this time it is the son, who died in Florence. I have already told you of this cruel affair, and I had no right to tell you. Though separated from that person out of delicacy, all is not over yet. I suffer through her; but I do not judge her. . . . Madame de C—— insists that she has never loved any one except M. de M—— and that she loves him still, that Artemisia of Ephesus. . . . You asked me, I believe, about Madame de C—— She has taken the thing, as I told you, tragically, and now distrusts the M—— family. Beneath all this, on both sides there is something inexplicable, and I have no desire to look for

[29] Philarète Chasles was a frequent visitor of her salon. See his *Mémoires,* v. 1. For details of her *liaison* with the Comte de Metternich, see S. de Lovenjoul, *Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac,* pp. 431, 432. When Balzac visited Madame Hanska at Vienna in the summer of 1835, he did a favor for the Duchesse de Castries while there. He wrote *La Filandière,* 1835, one of his *Contes drôlatiques,* for Madame de Castries' son, M. le baron d'Aldenburg.

the key of mysteries which do not concern me. I am with Madame de C—— on the proper terms of politeness, and as you yourself would wish me to be."

After their abrupt separation at Geneva, their relations continued to be estranged:

"For the moment I will tell you that Madame de C—— has written me that we are not to see each other again; she has taken offense at a letter, and I at many other things. Be assured that there is no love in all this! . . . I meant to speak to you of Madame de C——, but I have not the time. Twenty-five days hence I will tell you by word of mouth. In two words, your Honoré, my Éva, grew angry at the coldness which simulated friendship. I said what I thought; the reply was that I ought not to see again a woman to whom I could say such cruel things. I asked a thousand pardons for the 'great liberty,' and we continue on a very cold footing." [30]

Balzac was deeply wounded through his passionate love for Madame de Castries, and resented her leaving him in the depths of an abyss of coldness after having inflamed him with the fire of her soul; he began to think of revenge:

"I abhor Madame de C——, for she blighted my life without giving me another,— I do not say a comparable one, but without giving me what she promised. There is not the shadow of wounded vanity, oh! but disgust and contempt . . . If Madame de C——'s letter displeases you, say so frankly, my love. I will write to her

[30] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 63, October 24, 1833; p. 72, November 2, 1833.

that my affections are placed in a heart too jealous for me to be permitted to correspond with a woman who has her reputation for beauty, for charm, and that I act frankly in telling her so. . . ." [31]

Indeed, his experience with Madame de Castries at Geneva had made him so unhappy that on his return to that city to visit his *Prédilecta,* he had moments of joy mingled with sorrow, as the scenery recalled how, on his previous visit, he had wept over his *illusions perdues.* While other writers suggest different causes, one might surmise that this serious disappointment was the beginning of Balzac's heart trouble, for in speaking of it, he says: "It is necessary for my life to be bright and pleasant. The cruelties of the woman whom you know have been the cause of the trouble; then the disasters of 1848. . . ." [32]

He tried to overcome his dejection by intense work, but he could not forget the tragic suffering he had undergone. The experience he had recently passed through he disclosed in one of his most noted stories, *La Duchesse de Langeais,* which he wrote largely in 1834 at the same fatal city of Geneva, but this time, while enjoying the society of the beautiful Madame Hanska. In this story, under the name of the heroine, the Duchesse de Langeais, he describes the Duchesse de Castries:

"This was a woman artificially educated, but in reality ignorant; a woman whose instincts and feelings were

[31] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 107, 108, 114, January, 1834.

[32] *Correspondance,* 1819–1850, v. 2, p. 400, April 30, 1849. Letter to Madame Surville.

lofty, while the thought which should have controlled them was wanting. She squandered the wealth of her nature in obedience to social conventions; she was ready to brave society, yet she hesitated till her scruples degenerated into artifice. With more wilfulness than force of character, impressionable rather than enthusiastic, gifted with more brain than heart; she was supremely a woman, supremely a coquette, and above all things a *Parisienne,* loving a brilliant life and gaiety, reflecting never, or too late; imprudent to the verge of poetry, and humble in the depths of her heart, in spite of her charming insolence. Like some straight-growing reed, she made a show of independence; yet, like the reed, she was ready to bend to a strong hand. She talked much of religion, and had it not at heart, though she was prepared to find in it a solution of her life."

In the same story under the name of the Marquis de Montriveau, Balzac is doubtless portraying himself. It was probably in the home of the Duchesse de Castries that Balzac conceived some of his ideas of the aristocracy of the exclusive Faubourg Saint-Germain, a picture of which he has drawn in this story of which she is the heroine. Her influence is seen also in the characters so minutely drawn of the heartless *Parisienne,* no longer young, but seductive, refined and aristocratic, though deceptive and perfidious.

Before publishing *La Duchesse de Langeais,* the novelist was either tactful or vindictive enough to call on Madame de Castries and read to her his new book. He says of this visit: "I have just returned from Madame de C——, whom I do not want for an enemy when my

La Princesse Belgiojoso

book comes out, and the best means of obtaining a defender against the Faubourg Saint-Germain is to make her approve of the work in advance; and she greatly approved of it." [33] But a few weeks later, he writes: "Here I am, on bad terms with Madame de C—— on account of the *Duchesse de Langeais* — so much the better." [33] If Balzac refers to Madame de Castries in the following excerpt, one may even say that he had her correct this work.

> "Say whatever you like about *La Duchesse de Langeais,* your remarks do not affect me; but a lady whom you may perhaps know, illustrious and elegant, has approved everything, corrected everything like a royal censor, and her authority on ducal matters is incontestable; I am safe under the shadow of her shawl." [34]

Balzac continued to call on her and to write to her occasionally, and was very sympathetic in her illness, especially since her Parisian friends seemed to have abandoned her. Though death did not come to her until more than twenty-five years later, he writes at this time:

> "Madame de Castries is dying; the paralysis is attacking the other limb. Her beauty is no more; she is blighted. Oh! I pity her. She suffers horribly and inspires pity only. She is the only person I visit, and then, for one hour every week. It is more than I really can do, but that hour is compelled by the sight of that slow death." [35]

In her despondency he tries to cheer her:

[33] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 131, February 18, 1834, p. 138, March 9, 1834.

[34] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 52. Letter to Louise.

[35] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* p. 180, August 11, 1834.

"I do not like your melancholy; I should scold you well if you were here. I would put you on a large divan, where you would be like a fairy in the midst of her palace, and I would tell you that in this life you must love in order to live. Now, you do not love. A lively affection is the bread of the soul, and when the soul is not fed it grows starved, like the body. The bonds of the soul and body are such that each suffers with the other. . . . A thousand kindly things in return for your flowers, which bring me much happiness, but I wish for something more. . . . You have mingled bitterness with the flatteries you have the goodness to bestow on my book, as if you knew all the weight of your words and how far they would reach. I would a thousand times rather you would consider the book and the pen as things of your own, than receive these praises." [36]

Though his visits continued, their friendship gradually grew colder, and in 1836 he writes: "I have broken the last frail relations of politeness with Madame de C——. She enjoys the society of MM. Janni and Sainte-Beuve, who have so outrageously wounded me. It seemed to me bad taste, and now I am happily out of it." [37]

*La Duchesse de Langeais* appeared in 1834, but Madame de Castries had not fully wreaked her revenge on Balzac. For some time an Irish woman, a Miss Patrickson, had insisted on translating Balzac's works. Madame de Castries engaged her as teacher of English, and used

[36] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 2, 3, March, 1835, p. 23, October 18, 1835. It is interesting to note Balzac's fondness for flowers, as is seen in his association of them with various women, and the prominent place he has given them in some of his works, *par ex., Le Curé de Village.*

[37] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 300, January 30, 1836.

her as a means of ensnaring Balzac by having her write him a love letter and sign it "Lady Nevil." Though suspicious about this letter, he answered it, and a rendezvous was arranged at the opera. That day he called on Madame de Castries, and she had him remain for dinner. When he excused himself to go to the opera, she insisted on accompanying him; he then realized that he was a victim of her strategy, which he thus describes:

> "I go to the opera. No one there. Then I write a letter, which brings the miss, old, horrible, with hideous teeth, but full of remorse for the part she had played, full of affection for me and contempt and horror for the Marquise. Though my letters were extremely ironical and written for the purpose of making a woman masquerading as a false lady blush, she (Miss Patrickson) had recovered them. I had the upper hand of Madame de C—— She ended by divining that in this intrigue she was on the down side. From that time forth she vowed me a hatred which will end only with life. In fact, she may rise out of her grave to calumniate me. She never opened *Séraphita* on account of its dedication, and her jealousy is such that if she could completely destroy the book she would weep for joy." [38]

Notwithstanding their enmity, Balzac visited her occasionally. She had become so uncomely that he could not understand his infatuation at Aix, ten years before. He disliked her especially because she had for the moment, in

[38] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 445, November 7, 1837. Seized with pity for this poor Irish woman, Balzac called later to see about some translations and found her overcome by drink in the midst of poverty and dirt. He learned afterwards that she was addicted to the habit of drinking gin.

posing as Madame de Balzac, made Madame Hanska believe he was married. He enjoyed telling her of Madame Hanska's admiration for and devotion to him, and sarcastically remarked to her that she was such a "true friend" she would be happy to learn of his financial success. Thus, during a period of several years, while speaking of her as his enemy, the novelist continued to dine with her, but was ever ready to overwhelm her with sarcasm, even while her guest. Yet, in 1843, he dedicated to her *L'Illustre Gaudissart,* a work written ten years before.

Though he fully recovered with time, this drama, played by a coquette, was almost tragic for the author of the *Comédie humaine.* No other woman left so deep a mark of passion or such rankling wounds in his bleeding heart, as did she of whom he says:

> "It has required five years of wounds for my tender nature to detach itself from one of iron. A gracious woman, this Duchess of whom I spoke to you, and one who had come to me under an incognito, which, I render her this justice, she laid aside the day I asked her to, . . . This *liaison* which, whatever may be said, be assured has remained by the will of this woman in the most irreproachable conditions, has been one of the great sorrows of my life. The secret misfortunes of my situation actually come from the fact that I sacrificed everything to her, for a single one of her desires; she never divined anything. A wounded man must be pardoned for fearing injuries. . . . I alone know what there is of horror in the *Duchesse de Langeais.*" [39]

In 1831 Balzac asked for the hand of a young lady of

[39] *Correspondance,* 1819–1850, v. 1, pp. 358, 359. Letter to Louise.

the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Mademoiselle Eléonore de Trumilly, second daughter of his friend the Baron de Trumilly, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Artillery of the Royal guard under the Restoration, a former *émigré,* and of Madame Alexandra-Anna de Montiers. This request was received by her father, who transmitted it to her, but she rejected the suitor and married June 18, 1833, François-Félix-Claude-Marie-Marguerite Labroue, Baron de Vareilles-Sommières, of the diocese of Poitiers.

The Baron de Trumilly (died April 7, 1832) held high rank among the officers of the artillery, and his cultured mind rendered him one of the ornaments of society. He lived in friendly and intellectual relations with Balzac while the future novelist was working on the *Chouans* and the *Physiologie du Mariage,* and at the time Balzac was revising the latter for publication, he went to dine frequently at the home of the Baron, who used to work with him until late in the evening. In this work he introduces an old *émigré* under the initials of Marquis de T—— which are quite similar to those of the Baron de Trumilly. This Marquis de T—— went to Germany about 1791, which corresponds to the life of the Baron.

Baron de Trumilly welcomed Balzac into his home, took a great interest in his work, and seemed willing to give him one of his three daughters; but one can understand how the young novelist, who had not yet attained great fame, might not favorably impress a young lady of the social standing of Mademoiselle de Trumilly, and her father did not urge her to accept him.

Although Balzac wrote Madame Hanska that when he called the girl loved by Dr. Benassis in his " Confession "

(*Le Médecin de Campagne*) "Evelina," he said to himself, "She will quiver with joy in seeing that her name has occupied me, that she was present to my memory, and that what I deemed loveliest and noblest in the young girl, I have named for her," [40] some think that the lady he had in mind was not Mme. Hanska, but Elénore de Trumilly, who really was a young unmarried girl, while Madame Hanska was not only married, but the mother of several children. Again, letters written by the author to his family show his condition to have been desperate at that time. Balzac asserts that the story of *Louis Lambert* is true to life; hence, despondent over his own situation, he makes Louis Lambert become insane, and causes Dr. Benassis to think of suicide when disappointed in love.[41]

Thus was the novelist doomed, early in his literary career, to meet with a disappointment which, as has been seen, was to be repeated some months later with more serious results, when his adoration for the Duchesse de Castries was suddenly turned into bitterness.

MADAME HANSKA.— LA COMTESSE MNISZECH.— MADEMOISELLE BOREL.— MESDEMOISELLES WYLEZYNSKA. — LA COMTESSE ROSALIE RZEWUSKA.— MADEMOISELLE CALISTE RZEWUSKA.— MADAME CHERKOWITSCH.— MADAME RIZNITSCH.—LA COMTESSE MARIE POTOÇKA.

"And they talk of the first love! I know nothing so terrible as the last, it is strangling." [42]

[40] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 28, July 19, 1833.

[41] As to the authority and details of Balzac's love for Mademoiselle de Trumilly, see Jacques de Biez, Le *Figaro* Suppléments of April 6 and December 14, 1912.

[42] Balzac, *Les Ressources de Quinola,* p. 141.

The longest and by far the most important of Balzac's friendships begun by correspondence was the one with Madame Eveline Hanska, whose first letter arrived February 28, 1832. The friendship soon developed into a more sentimental relationship culminating March 14, 1850, when Madame Hanska became Madame Honoré de Balzac. This "grand and beautiful soul-drama" is one of the noblest in the world, and in the history of literature the longest.

So long was Balzac in pursuit of this apparent chimera, and so ardent was his passion for his "polar star" that the above words of Quinola may well be applied to his experience. So fervent was his adoration, so pathetic his sufferings and so persistent his pursuit during the seventeen long years of waiting that Miss Betham-Edwards has appropriately said of his letters to Madame Hanska:

> "Opening with a pianissimo, we soon reach *a con molto expressione,* a *crescendo,* a *molto furore* quickly following. Every musical term, adjectival, substantival, occurs to us as we read the thousand and odd pages of the two volumes. . . . Nothing in his fiction or any other, records a love greatening as the tedious years wore on, a love sovereignly overcoming doubt, despair and disillusion, such a love as the great Balzac's for *l'Étrangère.*" [43]

Their relationship from the beginning of their correspondence to the tragic end which came so soon after Balzac had arrived "at the summit of happiness," has been shrouded in mystery. This mystery has been heightened

[43] *A Great Love Story,* pp. 45, 91. It is doubtless a typographical error, *ibid.,* p. 53, where one reads that it was on the 28th of February, 1833, that Balzac received his first note from *l'Étrangère.*

by the vivid imagination of some of Balzac's biographers, where fancy replaces facts.

Miss Katherine P. Wormeley denies the authenticity of some of the letters published in the *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* saying:

> "No explanation is given of how these letters were obtained, and no proof or assurance is offered of their authenticity. A foot-note appended to the first letter merely states as follows: 'M. le vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, in whose hands are the originals of these letters, has related the history of this correspondence in detail, under the title of *Un Roman d'Amour* (Calmann Lévy, publisher). Madame Hanska, born Evelina (Eve) Rzewuska, who was then twenty-six or twenty-eight years old, resided at the château of Wierzchownia, in Volhynia. An enthusiastic reader of the *Scènes de la Vie privée,* uneasy at the different turns which the mind of the author was taking in *La Peau de Chagrin,* she addressed to Balzac — then thirty-three years old, in the care of the publisher Gosselin, a letter signed *l'Étrangère,* which was delivered to him February 28, 1832. Other letters followed; that of November 7 ended thus: 'A word from you in the *Quotidienne* will give me the assurance that you have received my letter, and that I can write to you without fear. Sign it; to *l'E—— H. de B.*' This acknowledgment of reception appeared in the *Quotidienne* of December 9. Thus was inaugurated the system of *petite* correspondence now practised in divers newspapers, and at the same time, this correspondence with her who was seventeen years later, in 1850, to become his wife."[44]

[44] Translator's Preface, *Letters to Madame Hanska,* pp. VII, VIII. Miss M. F. Sandars states that a copy of the *Quotidienne* containing this acknowledgment was in the possession of the Vicomte de

Regarding the two letters published in *Un Roman d'Amour,* pp. 33–49, dated November 7, 1832, and January 8, 1833, and signed *l'Étrangère,* Miss Wormeley says it is not necessary to notice them, since the author himself states that they are not in Madame Hanska's handwriting.

She is quite correct in this, for Spoelberch de Lovenjoul writes: "How many letters did Balzac receive thus? No one knows. But we possess two, neither of which is in Madame Hanska's handwriting." In speaking of the first letter that arrived, he says:

> "This first record of interest which was soon to change its nature, has unfortunately not been found yet. Perhaps this page perished in the *autodafé* which, as the result of a dramatic adventure, Balzac made of all the letters he had received from Madame Hanska; perhaps also, by dint of rereading it, he had worn it out and involuntarily destroyed it himself. We do not know. In any case, we have not found it in the part of his papers which have fallen into our hands. We regret it very much, for this letter must be remarkable to have produced

Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, and that she saw it. At the time of writing this preface, Miss Wormeley did not believe the correspondence began until February, 1833. In undertaking to prove this, she cited a letter from Balzac written to Madame Hanska, dated January 4, 1846, in which he says that the thirteen years will soon be completed since he received her first letter. She corrects this statement, however, in writing her *Memoir of Balzac* three years later. The mistake in this letter here mentioned is only an example of the inaccuracy of Balzac, found not only in his letters, but throughout the *Comédie humaine.* But Miss Wormeley's argument might have been refuted by quoting another letter from Balzac to Madame Hanska dated February, 1840: "After eight years you do not know me!" *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 527.

so great an impression on the future author of the *Comédie humaine.*" [45]

The question arises: If Balzac burned in 1847 "all the letters he had received from Madame Hanska," how could de Lovenjoul publish in 1896 two letters that he alleged to be from her, dated in 1832 and 1833?

The Princess Radziwill, who is the niece of Madame Honoré de Balzac and was reared by her in the home of Balzac in the rue Fortunée, has been both gracious and generous to the present writer in giving her much valuable information that could not have been obtained elsewhere. In answer to the above question, she states:

"Balzac said that he burned my aunt's letters in order to reassure her one day when she had reasons to fear they would fall into other hands than those to whom they belonged. After his death, my aunt found them all, and I am sorry to say that *it was she who burned them,* and that I was present at this *autodafé,* and remember to this day my horror and indignation. But my aunt as well as my father had a horror of leaving letters after them, and strange to say, they were right in fearing to leave them, because in both cases, papers had a fate they would not have liked them to have." [46]

The sketch of the family of Madame Honoré de Balzac as given in *Un Roman d'Amour* (pp. 13–18), is so inaccurate that the Princess Radziwill has very kindly made the following corrections of it for the present writer:

[45] *Un Roman d'Amour,* pp. 28, 31. For details of the controversy between Miss Wormeley and S. de Lovenjoul over Balzac's letters, see the *Academy,* 1900, May, June.

[46] Private papers belonging to the present writer.

"(1) Madame Hanska was really born on December *24th, not 25th,* 1801. You will find the date on her grave which is under the same monument as that of Balzac, in Père Lachaise in Paris. I am absolutely sure of the day, because my father was also born on Christmas Eve, and there were always great family rejoicings on that occasion. You know that the Roman Catholic church celebrates on the 24th of December the fête of Adam and Eve, and it is because they were born on that day that my father and his sister were called Adam and Eve. I am also quite sure that the year of my aunt's birth was 1801, and my father's 1803, and should be very much surprised if my memory served me false in that respect. But I repeat it, the exact dates are inscribed on my aunt's grave. . . . I looked up since I saw you a prayer book which I possess in which the dates of the birth are consigned, and thus found 1801, and I think it is the correct one, but at all events I repeat it once more, the exact date is engraved on her monument.

"(2) Caroline Rzewuska, my aunt's eldest sister, and the eldest of the whole family, is the Madame Cherkowitsch of Balzac's letters, and not Shikoff, as the family sketch says. It is equally ridiculous to say that some people aver she was married four times, and had General Witte for a husband; but Witte was a great admirer of hers at the time she was Mme. Sobanska. There is also a detail connected with her which is very little known, and that is that she nearly married Sainte-Beuve, and that the marriage was broken off a few days before the one fixed for it to take place. That was before she married Jules Lacroix, and wicked people say that it was partly disappointment at having been unable to become the wife of the great critic, which made her accept the former.

"(3) My aunt Pauline was married to a Serbian banker

settled in Odessa, a very rich man called Jean Riznitsch, but he was *neither a General, nor a Baron.* Her second daughter, Alexandrine, married Mr. Ciechanowiecki who also never could boast of a title, and whose father had never been *Minister de l'Intérieur en Pologne.*

"(4) My aunt Eve was neither married in 1818 nor in 1822 to Mr. Hanski, but in 1820. It was not because of *revers de fortune* that she was married to him, but it was the custom in Polish noble families to try to settle girls as richly as possible. Later on, my grandfather lost a great deal of money, but this circumstance, which occurred after my aunt's marriage, had nothing to do with it. My grandfather,— this by the way,— was a very remarkable man, a personal friend of Voltaire. You will find interesting details about him in an amusing book published by Ernest Daudet, called *La Correspondance du Comte Valentin Esterhazy,* in the first volume, where among other things is described the birth of my aunt Hélène, whose personality interests you so much, a birth which nearly killed her mother. Besides Hélène, my grandparents had still another daughter who also died unmarried, at seventeen years of age, and who, judging by her pictures, must have been a wonder of beauty; also a son Stanislas, who was killed accidentally by a fall from his horse in 1826.

"(5) My uncle Ernest was not the second son of his parents, but the youngest in the whole family." [47]

It is interesting to note that Balzac wished to have his works advertised in newspapers circulating in foreign countries and wrote his publisher to advertise in the *Gazette* and the *Quotidienne,* as they were the only papers admitted into Russia, Italy, etc. He repeated this request some months later, by which time he not only knew that

[47] Private papers of the present author.

*l'Étrangère* read the *Quotidienne,* but he had become interested in her.

As has been mentioned, it is a strange coincidence that this first letter from *l'Étrangère* arrived on the very day that the novelist wrote accepting the invitation of the Duchesse de Castries. Balzac doubtless little dreamed that this was the beginning of a correspondence which was destined to change the whole current of his life.

Many versions have been given as to what this letter contained, some saying that Madame Hanska had been reading the *Peau de Chagrin,* others, the *Physiologie du Mariage,* and others, the *Maison du Chat-qui-pelote,* but if the letter no longer exists how is one to prove what it contained? Yet it must have impressed Balzac, for he wanted to dedicate to her the fourth volume of the *Scènes de la Vie privée* in placing her seal and "Diis ignotis 28 février 1832" at the head of *l'Expiation,* the last chapter of *La Femme de trente Ans,* which he was writing when her letter arrived, but Madame de Berny objected, so he saved the only copy of that dedication and wished Madame Hanska to keep it as a souvenir, and as an expression of his thanks.

According to Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, Balzac showed one of Madame Hanska's letters to Madame Carraud, and she answered it for him; but with his usual skill in answering severe cross-examinations, he replies:

> "You have asked me with distrust to give an explanation of my two handwritings; but I have as many handwritings as there are days in the year, without being on that account the least in the world versatile. This mobility comes from an imagination which can conceive all

and remain virgin, like glass which is soiled by none of its reflections. The glass is in my brain." [48]

In this same letter, which is the second given, Balzac writes: ". . . I am galloping towards Poland, and re-reading all your letters,— I have but three of them, . . ." If this last statement be true, the answer to Spoelberch de Lovenjoul's question, " How many letters did Balzac receive thus? " is not difficult.

Miss Wormeley seems to be correct in saying that this second letter is inconsistent with the preceding one dated also in January, 1833, showing an arbitrary system of dating. There are others which are inconsistent, if not impossible, but if Spoelberch de Lovenjoul after the death of Madame Honoré de Balzac found these letters scattered about in various places, as he states, it is quite possible that contents as well as dates are confused.[49]

The husband of Madame Hanska, M. Wenceslas de Hanski, who was never a count, but a very rich man, was many years her senior, and suffered from " blue devils " and paresis a long time before his death. Though he was very generous with his wife in allowing her to travel, she often suffered from ennui in her beautifully furnished château of Wierzchownia, which Balzac described as being " as large as the Louvre." This was a great exaggeration, for it was comparatively small, having only about thirty rooms. With her husband, her little daughter Anna, her daughter's governess, Mademoiselle Henri-

[48] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 6, end of January, 1833.

[49] One can see at once the injustice of the criticism of M. Henry Bordeaux, *la Grande Revue,* November, 1899, pp. 452, 463, in censuring Madame Hanska for publishing her letters from Balzac.

ette Borel, and two Polish relatives, Mesdemoiselles Sévérine and Denise Wylezynska, she led a lonely life and spent much of her time in reading, or writing letters. The household comprised the only people of education for miles around.

Having lost six of her seven children, and being an intensely maternal woman, the deepest feelings of her heart were devoted to her daughter Anna, who also was destined to occupy much of the time and thought of the author of the *Comédie humaine.*

If the letters printed in *Un Roman d'Amour* are genuine, in the one dated January 8, 1833, she speaks of having received with delight the copy of the *Quotidienne* in which his notice is inserted. She tells him that M. de Hanski with his family are coming nearer France, and she wishes to arrange some way for him to answer her letters, but he must never try to ascertain who the person is who will transmit his letters to her, and the greatest secrecy must be preserved.

It is not known how she arranged to have him send his letters, but he wrote her about once a month from January to September, and after that more frequently, as he was arranging to visit her. M. de Hanski with his numerous family had come to Neufchâtel in July, having stopped in Vienna on the way. Here Balzac was to meet l'Étrangère for the first time. He left Paris September 22, stopping to make a business visit to his friend, Charles Bernard, at Besançon, and arriving at Neufchâtel September 25.[50] On the morning after his arrival, he writes her:

[50] Although this letter to M. Bernard is dated August, 1833, Balzac evidently meant September, for there was no Sunday, August 22, in

"I shall go to the Promenade of the faubourg from one o'clock till four. I shall remain during that time looking at the lake, which I have never seen." [51]

Just what happened when they met, no one knows. The Princess Radziwill says that her aunt told her that Balzac called at her hotel to meet her and that there was nothing romantic in their introduction. Nevertheless, the most varied and amusing stories have been told of their first meeting.

Balzac remained in Neufchâtel until October 1, having made a visit of five days. He took a secret box to Madame Hanska in which to keep his letters, having provided himself with a similar one in which to keep hers. If we are to credit the disputed letter of Saturday, October 12, we may learn something of what took place. Even before meeting Madame Hanska, he had inserted her name in one of his books, calling the young girl loved by M. Benassis "Evelina" (*Le Médecin de Campagne*).[52]

Early in October M. de Hanski took his family to Geneva to spend the winter. After Balzac's departure from Neufchâtel the tone of his letters to Madame Hanska changed; he used the *tutoiement,* and his adoration increased. For a while he wrote her a daily account of his life and dispatched the journal to her weekly.

Madame Hanska came into Balzac's life at a psychological moment. From his youth, his longing was "to be famous and to be loved." Having found the emptiness of a

1833. He did not leave Paris until Sunday, September 22, 1833. See *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 1, p. 372; also *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 38–45.

[51] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 44, 56, September 26, 1833.

[52] See the chapter on Mademoiselle de Trumilly.

Mme. de Berny

life of fame alone, having apparently grown weary of the poor Duchesse d'Abrantès, about to cease his intimacy with Madame de Berny, having been rejected by Mademoiselle de Trumilly, and having suffered bitterly at the hands of the Duchesse de Castries, he embraced this friendship with a new hope, and became Madame Hanska's slave.

If Balzac was charmed with the stories of the daughter of the *femme de chambre* of Marie Antoinette, was infatuated with a woman who had known Napoleon, and flattered by being invited to the home of one of the beautiful society ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, what must have been his joy in learning that his new *Châtelaine* belonged to one of the most aristocratic families of Poland, the grandniece of Queen Marie Leczinska, the daughter of the wise Comte de Rzewuska, and the wife of one of the richest men of Russia!

But Madame Hanska was a very different woman from the kind, self-sacrificing, romantic Madame de Berny; the witty splendor-loving, indulgent, poverty-stricken Duchesse d'Abrantès; or the frail, dazzling, blond coquette, the Duchesse de Castries. With more strength physically and mentally than her rivals, she possessed a marked authoritativeness that was not found in Madame de Berny, a breadth of vision impossible to Madame Junot, and freedom from the frivolity and coquetry of Madame de Castries.

The Princess Radziwill feels that the Polish woman who has come down to posterity merely as the object of Balzac's adoration, should be known as the being to whom he was indebted for the development of his marvelous

genius, and as his collaborator in many of his works. According to the Princess, *Modeste Mignon* is almost entirely the work of Madame Hanska's pen. She gives this description of her aunt, which corresponds to Balzac's continual reference to her "analytical forehead":

> "Madame de Balzac was perhaps not so brilliant in conversation as were her brothers and sisters. Her mind had something pedantic in it, and she was rather a good listener than a good talker, but whatever she said was to the point, and she was eloquent with her pen. She had that large glance only given to superior minds which allows them, according to the words of Catherine of Russia, 'to read the future in the history of the past.' She observed everything, was indulgent to every one. . . . Her family, who stood in more or less awe of her, treated her with great respect and consideration. . . . We all of us had a great opinion of the soundness of her judgments, and liked to consult her in any difficulty or embarrassment in our existence." [53]

No sooner had Balzac returned from his visit to Neufchâtel intoxicated with joy, than he began to plan his visit to Geneva. He would work day and night to be able to get away for a fortnight; he decided later to spend a month there, but he did not arrive until Christmas day. In the meantime, he referred to their promise (to marry) which was as holy and sacred to him as their mutual life, and he truly described his love as the most ardent, the most persistent of loves. *Adoremus in aeternum* had become their device, and Madame Hanska, not having as yet

[53] *Madame de Balzac,* the *Critic,* v. 45, p. 239, 1904.

become accustomed to his continual financial embarrassment, wished to provide him with money, an offer which is reproduced in *Eugénie Grandet.*

Upon his arrival at Geneva the novelist found a ring awaiting him; he considered it as a talisman, wore it working, and it inspired *Séraphita.* He became her *moujik* and signed his name *Honoreski.* She became his "love," his "life," his "rose of the Occident," his "star of the North," his "fairy of the *tiyeuilles,*" his "only thought," his "celestial angel," the end of all for him. "You shall be the young *dilecta,*— already I name you the *prédilecta.*" [54]

His adoration became such that he writes her: "My loved angel, I am almost mad for you . . . I cannot put two ideas together that you do not come between them. I can think of nothing but you. In spite of myself my imagination brings me back to you. . . ." [55] It was during his stay in Geneva that Madame Hanska presented her chain to him, which he used later on his cane.

Balzac left Geneva February 8, 1834, having spent forty-four days with his *Prédilecta,* but his work was not entirely neglected. While there, he wrote almost all of *La Duchesse de Langeais,* and a large part of *Séraphita.* This work, which she inspired, was dedicated

"To Madame Eveline de Hanska, née Countess Rzewuska.

"Madame: — here is the work you desired of me; in dedicating it to you I am happy to offer you some token

[54] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 111, January 1834. Balzac was imitating Madame Hanska's pronunciation of *tilleuls* in having Madame Vaquer (*Père Goriot*) pronounce it *tieuilles.*

[55] *Op. cit.,* p. 116, January 19, 1834.

of the respectful affection you allow me to feel for you. If I should be accused of incapacity after trying to extract from the depths of mysticism this book, which demanded the glowing poetry of the East under the transparency of our beautiful language, the blame be yours! Did you not compel me to the effort — such an effort as Jacob's — by telling me that even the most imperfect outline of the figure dreamed of by you, as it has been by me from my infancy, would still be something in your eyes? Here, then, is that something. Why cannot this book be set apart exclusively for those lofty spirits who, like you, are preserved from worldly pettiness by solitude? They might impress on it the melodious rhythm which it lacks, and which, in the hands of one of our poets, might have made it the glorious epic for which France still waits. Still, they will accept it from me as one of those balustrades, carved by some artist full of faith, on which the pilgrims lean to meditate on the end of man, while gazing at the choir of a beautiful church. I remain, madame, with respect, your faithful servant,

"De Balzac."

In the spring of 1834, M. de Hanski and his family left Geneva for Florence, traveled for a few months, and arrived in Vienna during the summer, where they remained for about a year. But Balzac continued his correspondence with Madame Hanska. She was interested in collecting the autographs of famous people, and Balzac not only had an album made for her, but helped her collect the signatures.

More infatuated, if possible, than ever with her, he wanted her to secure her husband's consent for him to

visit them at Rome. Then he felt that he must go to Vienna, see the Danube, explore the battlefields of Wagram and Essling, and have pictures made representing the uniforms of the German army.

In *La Recherche de l'Absolu,* he gave the name of Adam de Wierzchownia to a Polish gentleman, Wierzchownia being the name of Madame Hanska's home in the Ukraine. "I have amused myself like a boy in naming a Pole, M. de Wierzchownia, and bringing him on the scene in *La Recherche de l'Absolu.* That was a longing I could not resist, and I beg your pardon and that of M. de Hanski for the great liberty. You could not believe how that printed page fascinates me!"[56] He writes her of another character, La Fosseuse, (*Le Médecin de Campagne*): "Ah! if I had known your features, I would have pleased myself in having them engraved as La Fosseuse. But though I have memory enough for myself, I should not have enough for a painter."[56]

Either Balzac's adoration became too ardent, or displeasure was caused in some other way, for no letters to Madame Hanska appear from August 26 to October 19, 1834. In the meantime, a long letter was written to M. de Hanski apologizing for two letters written to his wife. He explained that one evening she jestingly remarked to him, beside the lake of Geneva, that she would like to know what a love-letter was like, so he promised to write her one. Being reminded of this promise, he sent her one, and received a cold letter of reproof from her after another letter was on the way to her. Receiving a second

[56] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 168, 169, July 1, 1834.

rebuke, he was desperate over the pleasantry, and wished to atone for this by presenting to her, with M. de Hanski's permission, some manuscripts already sent. He wished to send her the manuscript of *Séraphita* also, and to dedicate this book to her, if they could forgive him this error, for which he alone was to be censured.

Balzac was evidently pardoned, for he not only dedicated *Séraphita* to her, as has been shown, but arrived in Vienna on May 16, 1835, to visit her, bringing with him this manuscript. His stay was rather short, lasting only to June 4. While there, he was quite busy working on *Le Lys dans la Vallée,* and declined many invitations. To get his twelve hours of work, he had to retire at nine o'clock in order to rise at three; this monastic rule dominated everything. He yielded something of his stern observance to Madame Hanska by giving himself three hours' more freedom than in Paris, where he retired at six.

Soon after his return from Vienna, the novelist was informed that a package from Vienna was held for him with thirty-six francs due. Having, of course, no money, he sent his servant in a cab for the package, telling him where he could secure the money and, dead or alive, to bring the package. After spending four hours in an agony of anticipation, wondering what Madame Hanska could be sending him, his messenger arrived with a copy of *Père Goriot* which he had given her in Vienna with the request that she give it to some one to whom it might afford pleasure.

It will be remembered that while in Vienna, Balzac's financial strain became such that his sister Laure pawned

his silver. He afterwards admitted that the journey to Vienna was the greatest folly of his life; it cost him five thousand francs and upset all his affairs. He had other financial troubles also, but found time and means to consult a somnambulist frequently as to his *Prédilecta,* and regretted that he did not have one or two soothsayers, so that he might know daily about her. His superstition is seen early in their correspondence where he considered it a good omen that Madame Hanska had sent him the *Imitation de Jésus-Christ* while he was working on *Le Médecin de Campagne.* Again and again he insisted that she tell him when any of her family were ill, feeling that he could cure at a distance those whom he loved; or that she should send him a piece of cloth worn next to her person, that he might present this to a clairvoyant.

After delving deeply into mysticism, and writing some books dealing with it, the novelist writes his "Polar Star":

> "I am sorry to see that you are reading the mystics: believe me, this sort of reading is fatal to minds like yours; it is a poison; it is an intoxicating narcotic. These books have a bad influence. There are follies of virtue as there are follies of dissipation and vice. If you were not a wife, a mother, a friend, a relation, I would not seek to dissuade you, for then you might go and shut yourself up in a convent at your pleasure without hurting anybody, although you would soon die there. In your situation, and in your isolation in the midst of those deserts, this kind of reading, believe me, is pernicious. The rights of friendship are too feeble to make my voice heard; but let me at least make an earnest and humble request on this

subject. Do not, I beg of you, ever read anything more of this kind. I have myself gone through all this, and I speak from experience." [57]

As has been stated, Madame Hanska was of assistance to Balzac in his literary work. He used her ideas frequently, and was gracious in expressing his appreciation of them to her:

"I must tell you that yesterday . . . I copied out your portrait of Mademoiselle Céleste, and I said to two uncompromising judges: 'Here is a sketch I have flung on paper. I wanted to paint a woman under given circumstances, and launch her into life through such and such an event.' What do you think they said?—'Read that portrait again.' After which they said:—'That is your masterpiece. You have never before had that *laisser-aller* of a writer which shows the hidden strength.' 'Ha, ha!' I answered, striking my head; 'that comes from the forehead of *an analyst.*' I kneel at your feet for this violation; but I left out all that was personal. . . . I thank you for your glimpses of Viennese society. What I have learned about Germans in their relations elsewhere confirms what you say of them. Your story of General H—— comes up periodically. There has been something like it in all countries, but I thank you for having told it to me. The circumstances give it novelty." [58]

Though Balzac's letters to Madame Hanska became less effervescent as time went on, each year seemed to add to

[57] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 43, October 1836.

[58] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 210, 239, November 26, 1834, March 11, 1835. This is only one of the numerous allusions Balzac made to the analytical forehead of Madame Hanska.

his admiration and "dog-like fidelity." She, on the other hand, complained of his dissipation, the society he kept, and his short letters.

While Balzac was in Vienna, he was working on *Le Lys dans la Vallée*. Although he said that Madame de Mortsauf was Madame de Berny, M. Adam Rzewuski, a brother of Madame Hanska, always felt that this character represented his sister, and called attention to the same intense maternal feeling of the two women, and the same sickly, morose husband. The Princess Radziwill also believes that this is a portrait of her aunt, which hypothesis is further strengthened by comments of Émile Faguet, who says that to one who has read Balzac's letters in 1834–1835 closely, it is clear that Madame de Mortsauf is Madame Hanska, and that the marvelous M. de Mortsauf is M. de Hanski.

Mr. F. Lawton also thinks that Balzac has shown his relations to Madame Hanska in making Félix de Vandenesse console himself with Lady Dudley while swearing high allegiance to his Henriette, just as Balzac was "inditing oaths of fidelity to his 'earth-angel' in far-away Russia while worshiping at shrines more accessible. Lady Dudley may well have been, for all his denial, the Countess Visconti, of whom Madame Hanska was jealous and on good grounds, or else the Duchesse de Castries, to whom he said that while writing the book he had caught himself shedding tears." [59] Balzac says of this book:

> "I have received five *formal complaints* from persons about me, who say that I have unveiled their private lives.

[59] *Balzac*, pp. 98, 99.

I have very curious letters on this subject. It appears that there are as many Messieurs de Mortsauf as there are angels at Clochegourde, and angels rain down upon me, but *they are not white.*" [60]

In the early autumn of 1835, M. de Hanski and his family, having spent several weeks at Ischl, returned to their home at Wierzchownia after an absence of more than two years. It was during this long stay at Vienna that Madame Hanska had Daffinger make the miniature which occupies so much space in Balzac's letters in later years.

It must have been a relief to poor Balzac when his *Châtelaine* returned to her home, for while traveling she was negligent about giving him her address, so that he was never sure whether she received all his letters, and she did not number hers, as he had asked her to do, so he was not certain that he received all that she wrote him; neither would she — though leading a life of leisure — write as often as he wished. But if he scolded her for this, she had other matters to worry her. She was ever anxious about the safety of her letters, asked for many explanations of his conduct, for interpretations of various things in his works, and who certain friends were, so much so that his letters are filled with vindications of himself. Even before they had ever met, he wrote her that he could not take a step that was not misinterpreted. She seemed continually to be hearing of something derogatory to his character, and trying to investigate his actions. The reader has had glimpses enough of Balzac's life to understand what a task was hers. Yet she doubtless sometimes

[60] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 351, September 30, 1836.

accused him unnecessarily, and he in turn became impatient:

"This letter contains two reproaches which have keenly affected me; and I think I have already told you that a few chance expressions would suffice to make me go to Wierzchownia, which would be a misfortune in my present perilous situation; but I would rather lose everything than lose a true friendship. . . . In short, you distrust me at a distance, just as you distrusted me near by, without any reason. I read quite despairingly the paragraph of your letter in which you do the honors of my heart to my mind, and sacrifice my whole personality to my brain. . . . In your last letters, you know, you have believed things that are irreconcilable with what you know of me. I cannot explain to myself your tendency to believe absurd calumnies. I still remember your credulity in Geneva, when they said I was married." [61]

Even her own family added to her suspicions:

". . . Your letter has crushed me more than all the heavy nonsense that jealousy and calumny, lawsuit and money matters have cast upon me. My sensibility is a proof of friendship; there are none but those we love who can make us suffer. I am not angry with your aunt, but I am angry that a person as distinguished as you say she is should be accessible to such base and absurd calumny. But you yourself, at Geneva, when I told you I was as free as air, you believed me to be married, on the word of one of those fools whose trade it is to sell money. I began to laugh. Here, I no longer laugh, because I have

[61] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 291, 344, January 18, 1836, July 13, 1836.

the horrible privilege of being horribly calumniated. A few more controversies like the last, and I shall retire to the remotest part of Touraine, isolating myself from everything, renouncing all, . . . Think always that what I do has a reason and an object, that my actions are *necessary*. There is, for two souls that are a little above others, something mortifying in repeating to you for the tenth time not to believe in calumny. When you said to me three letters ago, that I gambled, it was just as true as my marriage at Geneva. . . . You attribute to me little defects which I do not have to give yourself the pleasure of scolding me. No one is less extravagant than I; no one is willing to live with more economy. But reflect that I work too much to busy myself with certain details, and, in short, that I had rather spend five to six thousand francs a year than marry to have order in my household; for a man who undertakes what I have undertaken either marries to have a quiet existence, or accepts the wretchedness of La Fontaine and Rousseau. For pity's sake, do not talk to me of my want of order; it is the consequence of the independence in which I live, and which I desire to keep." [62]

In spite of these reproaches, Balzac's affection for her continued, and he decided to have his portrait made for her. Boulanger was the artist chosen, and since he wished payment at once, Madame Hanska sent the novelist a sum for this purpose. For a Christmas greeting, 1836, she sent him a copy of the Daffinger miniature made at Vienna the preceding year. Again — this time in *Illusions perdues* — he gave her name, Ève, to a young girl

[62] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 335, 356, 375, June, October 1836, January 15, 1837.

whom he regarded as the most charming creature he had created (Ève Chardon, who became Madame David Séchard).

In the spring of 1837 Balzac went to Italy to spend a few weeks. Seeing at Florence a bust of his *Prédilecta,* made by Bartolini, he asked M. de Hanski's permission to have a copy of it, half size, made for himself, to place on his writing desk. This journey aroused Madame Hanska's suspicions again, but he assured her he was not dissipating, but was traveling to rejuvenate his broken-down brain, since, working night and day as he did, a man might easily die of overstrain.

He continued to save his manuscripts for her, awaiting an opportunity to send or take them to her. Her letters became less frequent and full of stings, but he begged her to disbelieve everything she heard of him except from himself, as she had almost a complete journal of his life. He explanied that the tour he purposed making to the Mediterranean was neither for marriage nor for anything adventurous or silly, but he was pledged to secrecy, and, whether it turned out well or ill, he risked nothing but a journey. As to her reproaches how he, knowing all, penetrating and observing all, could be so duped and deceived, he wondered if she could love him if he were always so prudent that no misfortune ever happened to him.

In the spring of 1838 he took his Mediterranean trip, going to Corsica, Sardinia and Italy in quest of his Eldorado, but, as usual, he was doomed to meet with disappointment. On his return he went to *Les Jardies* to reside, which was later to be the cause of another financial disaster. Replying to her criticism of his journey to

Sardinia, he begged her never to censure those who feel themselves sunk in deep waters and are struggling to the surface, for the rich can never comprehend the trials of the unfortunate. One must be without friends, without resources, without food, without money, to know to its depths what misfortune is.

In spite of her reproaches he continued to protest his devotion to her. Though her letters were cold, he begged her to gaze on the portrait of her *moujik* and feel that he was the most constant, least volatile, most steadfast of men. He was willing to obey her in all things except in his affections, and she was complete mistress of those. Seized with a burning desire to see her, he planned a visit to Wierzchownia as soon as his financial circumstances would permit.

During a period of three months, Balzac received no letter from his "Polar Star," but he expressed his usual fidelity to her. Miserable or fortunate, he was always the same to her; it was because of his unchangeableness of heart that he was so painfully wounded by her neglect. Carried away, as he often was, by his torrential existence, he might miss writing to her, but he could not understand how she could deprive him of the sacred bread which restored his courage and gave him new life.

His long struggle with his debts and his various financial and domestic troubles seemed at times to deprive him of his usual hope and patience. In a depressed vein, he replies to one of her letters:

> "Ah! I think you excessively small; and it shows me that you are of this world! Ah! you write to me no

longer because my letters are rare! Well, they were rare because I often did not have the money to post them, but I would not tell you that. Yes, my distress has reached that point and beyond it. It is horrible and sad, but it is true, as true as the Ukraine where you are. Yes, there have been days when I proudly ate a roll of bread on the boulevard. I have had the greatest sufferings: self-love, pride, hope, prospects, all have been attacked. But I shall, I hope, surmount everything. I had not a penny, but I earned for those atrocious Lecou and Delloye seventy thousand francs in a year. The Peytel affair cost me ten thousand francs, and people said I was paid fifty thousand! That affair and my fall, which kept me as you know, forty days in bed, retarded my business by more than thirty thousand francs. Oh! I do not like your want of confidence! You think that I have a great mind, but you will not admit that I have a great heart! After nearly eight years, you do not know me! My God, forgive her, for she knows not what she does!" [63]

The novelist wrote his *Prédilecta* of his ideas of marriage, and how he longed to marry, but he became despondent about this as well as about his debts; he felt that he was growing old, and would not live long. His comfort while working was a picture of Wierzchownia which she had sent him, but in addition to all of his other troubles he was annoyed because some of her relatives who were in Paris carried false information to her concerning him.

Not having heard from her for six months, he resorted to his frequent method of allaying his anxiety by consulting a clairvoyant to learn if she were ill. He was told

[63] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 527, February 1840.

that within six weeks he would receive a letter that would change his entire life. Almost four more months passed, however, without his hearing from her and he feared that she was not receiving his letters, or that hers had gone astray, as he no longer had a home.

For once, the sorcerer had predicted somewhat correctly! Not within six weeks, to be sure, but within six months, the letter came that was to change Balzac's entire life. On January 5, 1842, a letter arrived from Madame Hanska, telling of the death of M. de Hanski which had occurred November 10, 1841.

His reply is one of the most beautiful of his letters to her:

> "I have this instant received, dear angel, your letter sealed with black, and, after having read it, I could not perhaps have wished to receive any other from you, in spite of the sad things you tell me about yourself and your health. As for me, dear, adored one, although this event enables me to attain to that which I have ardently desired for nearly ten years, I can, before you and God, do myself this justice, that I have never had in my heart anything but complete submission, and that I have not, in my most cruel moments, stained my soul with evil wishes. No one can prevent involuntary transports. Often I have said to myself, 'How light my life would be with *her!*' No one can keep his faith, his heart, his inner being without hope. . . . But I understand the regrets which you express to me; they seem to me natural and true, especially after the protection which has never failed you since that letter at Vienna. I am, however, joyful to know that I can write to you with open heart to tell you all those things on which I have kept silence, and disperse the melancholy

complaints you have founded on misconceptions, so difficult to explain at a distance. I know you too well, or I think I know you too well, to doubt you for one moment; and I have often suffered, very cruelly suffered, that you have doubted me, because, since Neufchâtel, you are my life. Let me say this to you plainly, after having so often proved it to you. The miseries of my struggle and of my terrible work would have tired out the greatest and strongest men; and often my sister has desired to put an end to them, God knows how; I always thought the remedy worse than the disease! It is you alone who have supported me till now, . . . You said to me, 'Be patient, you are loved as much as you love. Do not change, for others change not.' We have both been courageous; why, therefore, should you not be happy to-day? Do you think it was for myself that I have been so persistent in magnifying my name? Oh! I am perhaps very unjust, but this injustice comes from the violence of my heart! I would have liked two words for myself in your letter, but I sought them in vain; two words for him who, since the landscape in which you live has been before his eyes, has not passed, while working, ten minutes without looking at it; I have there sought all, ever since it came to me, that we have asked in the silence of our spirits."

He was concerned about her health and wished to depart at once, but feared to go without her permission. She was anxious about her letters, but he assured her that they were safe, and begged her to inform him when he could visit her; for six years he had been longing to see her. "Adieu, my dear and beautiful life that I love so well, and to whom I can now say it. *Sempre medisimo.*" [64]

[64] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 571–575, January 5, 1842.

The rôle played by M. de Hanski [65] in this friendship was a peculiar one. The correspondence, as has been seen, began in secrecy, but Balzac met him when he went to Neufchâtel to see Madame Hanska. Their relations were apparently cordial, for on his return to Paris, the novelist wrote him a friendly note, enclosing an autograph of Rossini whom M. de Hanski admired. The Polish gentleman (he was never a count) must have been willing to have Balzac visit his wife again, at Geneva, where their friendship seemed to grow warmer. Balzac called him *l'honorable Maréchal de l'Ukraine* or the *Grand Maréchal,* and extended to him his thanks or regards in sending little notes to Madame Hanska, and thus he was early cognizant of their correspondence. The future author of the *Comédie humaine* seems to have been taken into the family circle and to have become somewhat a favorite of M. de Hanski, who was suffering with his " blue devils " at that time.

Since Balzac was not only an excellent story-teller but naturally very jovial, and M. de Hanski suffered from ennui and wished to be amused, they became friends. On his return to Paris, they exchanged a few letters, and Balzac introduced stories to amuse him in his letters to Madame Hanska. He wrote most graciously to the *Maréchal,* apologizing for the two love letters he had written his wife, and this letter was answered. The novelist was invited by him to visit them in Wierzchownia — an invitation he planned to accept, but did not.

[65] The present writer is following the predominant custom of using the *de* in connection with M. de Hanski's name, and omitting it in speaking of his wife.

In the spring of 1836, M. de Hanski sent Balzac a very handsome malachite inkstand, also a cordial letter telling him the family news, how much he enjoyed his works, and that he hoped with his family to visit him in Paris within two years. He mentioned that his wife was preparing for Balzac a long letter of several pages, and assured him of his sincere friendship. Balzac was most appreciative of the gift of the beautiful inkstand, but felt that it was too magnificent for a poor man to use, so would place it in his collection and prize it as one of his most precious souvenirs.

Besides discussing business with the Polish gentleman, Balzac apologized often for not answering his letters, offering lack of time as his excuse, but he planned to visit Wierzchownia, where he and M. de Hanski would enjoy hearty laughs while Madame Hanska could work at his comedies. In spite of this friendly correspondence, the *Maréchal* probably hinted to his wife that her admiration for the author was too warm, for Balzac asked her to reassure her husband that he was not only invulnerable, but immune from attack. Balzac spoke of dedicating one of his books in the *Comédie humaine* to M. de Hanski, but no dedication to him is found in this work. His death, which occurred some months after this suggestion, doubtless prevented the realization of it.

Balzac evidently received a negative reply to his letter to Madame Hanska asking to be permitted to visit her immediately after her husband's death. It would have been a breach of the *convenances* had he gone to visit her so early in her widowhood. Soon after learning of M. de Hanski's death, he saw an announcement of the death of a

Countess Kicka of Volhynia, and since his "Polar Star" had spoken of being ill, he was seized with fear lest this be a misprint for Hanska, and was confined to his bed for two days with a nervous fever.

What must have been Balzac's disappointment, when almost ready to leave at any moment, to receive a letter which, as he expressed it, killed the youth in him and rent his heart! She felt that she owed everything to her daughter, who had consoled her, and nothing to him; yet she knew that she was everything to him.

He thought that she loved Anna too much, protested his fidelity to her when she accused him, and reverted to his favorite theme of comparing her to the devoted Madame de Berny. He complained of her coldness, wanted to visit her in August at St. Petersburg, and desired her to promise that they would be married within two years.

> "When Madame Hanska's husband died, it was supposed that her union with Balzac would occur at once, but obstacles were interposed by others. Her own family looked down upon the great French author as a mere story-teller; and by her late husband's people sordid motives were imputed to him, to account for his devotion to the heiress. The latter objection was removed, a few years later, by the widow's giving up to her daughter the fortune left to her by Monsieur Hanski." [66]

It is at this period that Balzac furnishes us with the key to one of his works, *Albert Savarus,* in writing to Madame Hanska:

> "*Albert Savarus* has had much success. You will read

[66] Princess Radziwill, *Madame de Balzac,* the *Critic,* v. 45, p. 241, 1904.

it in the first volume of the *Comédie humaine,* almost after the *fausse Mâitresse*, where with childish joy I have made the name *Rzewuski* shine in the midst of those of the most illustrious families of the North. Why have I not placed Francesca Colonna at Diodati? Alas, I was afraid that it would be too transparent. Diodati makes my heart beat! Those four syllables, it is the cry of the *Montjoie Saint-Denis!* of my heart." [67]

Francesca Colonna, the Princess Gandolphini, is the heroine of *l'Ambitieux par Amour,* a novel supposed to have been published by Albert Savarus and described in the book which bears his name. Using her name, the hero is represented as having written the story of the Duchesse d'Argaïolo and himself, he taking the name of Rodolphe. Here are given, in disguise again, the details of Balzac's early relation to Madame Hanska. Albert Savarus, while traveling in Switzerland, sees a lady's face at the window of an upper room, admires it and seeks the lady's acquaintance. She proves to be the Duchesse d'Argaïolo, an Italian in exile. She had been married very young to the Duke d'Argaïolo, who was rich and much older than she. The young man falls in love with this beautiful lady, and she promises to be his as soon as she becomes free.

Gabriel Ferry states that Balzac first saw Madame Hanska's face at a window, and the Princess Radziwill says that Balzac went to the hotel to meet her aunt. It is to be noted that the year 1834 is that in which Balzac and Madame Hanska were in Geneva together.

The Villa Diodati, noted for having been inhabited by

[67] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 54, July 12 (1842).

Lord Byron, is situated on Lake Geneva, at Cologny, not far from Pré Lévèque,[68] where M. de Hanski and his family resided in the *maison Mirabaud-Amat.* There are numerous allusions to Diodati in Balzac's correspondence, from which one would judge that he had some very unhappy associations with Madame de Castries, and some very happy ones with Madame Hanska in connection with Diodati:

> "When I want to give myself a magnificent fête, I close my eyes, lie down on one of my sofas, . . . and recall that good day at Diodati which effaced a thousand pangs I had felt there a year before. You have made me know the difference between a true affection and a simulated one, and for a heart as childlike as mine, there is cause there for an eternal gratitude. . . . When some thought saddens me, then I have recourse to you; . . . I see again Diodati, I stretch myself on the good sofa of the Maison Mirabaud, . . . Diodati, that image of a happy life, reappears like a star for a moment clouded, and I begin to laugh, as you know I can laugh. I say to myself that so much work will have its recompense, and that I shall have, like Lord Byron, my Diodati. I sing in my bad voice: 'Diodati, Diodati!'"[69]

Another excerpt shows that Balzac had in mind his own life in connection with Madame Hanska's in writing *Albert Savarus*:

[68] Balzac preserved a remembrance of the happy days he had spent with Madame Hanska at Pré-Lévèque, Lake Geneva, by dating *La Duchesse de Langeais,* January 26, 1834, Pré-Lévèque.

[69] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 163, 204, 247, June 3, 1834, October 26, 1834, May 1, 1835.

". . . It is six o'clock in the morning, I have interrupted myself to think of you, reminded of you by Switzerland where I have placed the scene of *Albert Savarus*.— Lovers in Switzerland,— for me, it is the image of happiness. I do not wish to place the Princess Gandolphini in the *maison Mirabaud,* for there are people in the world who would make a crime of it for us. This Princess is a foreigner, an Italian, loved by Savarus."[70]

Many of Balzac's traits are seen in Albert Savarus. Like Balzac, Albert Savarus was defeated in politics, but hoped for election; was a lawyer, expected to rise to fame, and was about three years older than the woman he loved. Like Madame Hanska, the Duchesse d'Argaïolo, known as the Princess Gandolphini, was beautiful, noble, a foreigner, and married to a man very rich and much older than she, who was not companionable. It was on December 26 that Albert Savarus arrived at the Villa on Lake Geneva to visit his princess, while Balzac arrived December 25 to visit Madame Hanska at her Villa there. The two lovers spent the winter together, and in the spring, the Duc d'Argaïolo (Prince Gandolphini) and his wife went to Naples, and Albert Savarus (Rodolphe) returned to Paris, just as M. de Hanski took his family to Italy in the spring, while Balzac returned to Paris.

Albert Savarus was falsely accused of being married, just as Madame Hanska had accused Balzac. The letters to the Duchess from Savarus are quite similar to some Balzac wrote to Madame Hanska. Like Balzac, Savarus saw few people, worked at night, was poor, ever

[70] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 40, May 14 (1842).

hopeful, communed with the portrait of his adored one, had trouble in regard to the delivery of her letters, and was worried when they did not come; yet he was patient and willing to wait until the Duke should die. Like Madame Hanska, the Duchess feared her lover was unfaithful to her, and in both cases a woman sowed discord, though the results were different.[71]

Madame Hanska did not care for this book, but Balzac told her she was not familiar enough with French society to appreciate it.

Miss Mary Hanford Ford thinks that Madame Hanska inspired another of Balzac's works: "It is probable that in Madame de la Chanterie we are given Balzac's impassioned and vivid idealization of the woman who became his wife at last. . . . Balzac's affection for Madame Hanska was to a large degree tinged with the reverence which the Brotherhood shared for Madame de la Chanterie. . . ." [72] While the Frères de la Consolation adored Madame de la Chanterie in a beautiful manner, neither her life nor her character was at all like Madame Hanska's. This work is dated December, 1847, Wierzchownia, and was doubtless finished there, but he had been working on it for several years.

In the autumn of 1842,[73] Madame Hanska went to St.

[71] Miss K. P. Wormeley does not think that *Albert Savarus* was inspired by Balzac's relations with Madame Hanska. For her arguments, see *Memoir of Balzac,* p. 169.

[72] *Balzac's Séraphita,* p. 73. See *L'Envers de l'Histoire contemporaine* for this character.

[73] Émile Faguet, *Balzac,* says that it was in 1843 that Madame Hanska went to St. Petersburg. He has made several such slight mistakes throughout this work.

Petersburg. She complained of a sadness and melancholy which Balzac's most ardent devotion could not overcome. He became her *patito,* and she the queen of his life, but he too suffered from depression, and even consented to wait three years for her if she would only permit him to visit her. He insisted that his affection was steadfast and eternal, but in addition to showing him coldness, she unjustly rebuked him, having heard that he was gambling. She had a prolonged lawsuit, and he wished her to turn the matter over to him, feeling sure that he could win the case for her.

Thus passed the year 1842. She eventually consented to let him come in May to celebrate his birthday. But alas! A great *remora* stood in the way. Poor Balzac did not have the money to make the trip. Then also he had literary obligations to meet, but he felt very much fatigued from excessive work and wanted to leave Paris for a rest. Her letters were so unsatisfactory that he implored her to engrave in her dear mind, if she would not write it in her heart, that he wished her to use some of her leisure time in writing a few lines to him daily. As was his custom when in distress, he sought a fortune-teller for comfort, and as usual, was delighted with his prophecy. The notorious Balthazar described to him perfectly the woman he loved, told him that his love was returned, that there would never be a cloud in their sky, in spite of the intensity of their characters, and that he would be going to see her within six months. The soothsayer was correct in this last statement, at least, for Balzac arrived at St. Petersburg soon after this interview.

Madame Hanska felt that she was growing old, but Bal-

zac assured her that he should love her even were she ugly, and he relieved her mind of this fear by writing in her *Journal intime* that although he had not seen her since they were in Vienna, he thought her as beautiful and young as then — after an interval of seven years.[74]

Balzac arrived in St. Petersburg on July 17/29, and left there late in September,[75] 1843, stopping to visit in Berlin and Dresden. Becoming very ill, he cut short his visit to Mayence and Cologne and arrived in Paris November 3, in order to consult his faithful Dr. Nacquart. Excess of work, the sorrow of leaving Madame Hanska, disappointment, and deferred hopes were too much for his nervous system. His letters to Madame Hanska were, if possible, filled with greater detail than ever concerning his debts, his household and family matters, his works, and society gossip. The *tu* frequently replaces the *vous,* and having apparently exhausted all the endearing names in the French language, he resorted to the Hebrew, and finds that *Lididda* means so many beautiful things that he employs this word. He calls her *Liline* or *Line;* she becomes his *Louloup,* his "lighthouse," his "happy star," and the *sicura richezza, senza brama.*

[74] Balzac should have said an interval of *eight* years instead of *seven,* for he visited her in Vienna in May and June, 1835, and he wrote this in September 1843. This is only one of the novelist's numerous mistakes in figuring, seen throughout his entire works.

[75] Unless the editor of *Lettres à l'Étrangère* is confusing the French and Russian dates, he has made a mistake in dating certain of Balzac's letters from St. Petersburg. He has two dated October 1843, St. Petersburg, and on his way home from there Balzac writes from Taurogen dating his letter September 27–October 10, 1843. Hence the exact date of his departure from St. Petersburg is obscure.

Madame Hanska and Balzac seem to have had many idiosyncrasies in common, among which was their *penchant* for jewelry, as well as perfumes. Since their meeting at Geneva, the two exchanged gifts of jewelry frequently, and the discussion, engraving, measuring, and exchanging of various rings occupied much of Balzac's precious time.

His fondness for antiques was another extravagance, and he invested not a little in certain pieces of furniture which had belonged to Marie de Médicis and Henri IV; this purchase he regretted later, and talked of selling, but, instead, added continually to his collection. He was constantly sending, or wanting to send some present to Madame Hanska or to her daughter Anna, but nothing could be compared with the priceless gift he received from her. The Daffinger miniature arrived February 2, 1844.

As a New Year's greeting for 1844, Balzac dedicated to Madame Hanska *Les Bourgeois de Paris,* later called *Les petits Bourgeois,* saying that the first work written after his brief visit with her should be inscribed to her. This dedication is somewhat different from the one published in his *Œuvres:*

"To Constance-Victoire: [76]

"Here, madame and friend, is one of those works

[76] *Constance* was either one of Madame Hanska's real names, or one given her by Balzac, for he writes to her, in speaking of Mademoiselle Borel's entering the convent: "My most sincere regards to *Soeur Constance,* for I imagine that Saint Borel will take one of your names." *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 256, December 30, 1843. Although Balzac hoped at one time to have *Les petits Bourgeois* completed by July 1844, it was left unfinished at his death, and was completed and published in 1855.

which fall, we know not whence, into an author's mind and afford him pleasure before he can estimate how they will be received by the public, that great judge of our time. But, almost sure of your good-will, I dedicate it to you. It belongs to you, as formerly the tithe belonged to the church, in memory of God from whom all things come, who makes all ripen, all mature! Some lumps of clay left by Molière at the base of his statue of Tartufe have been molded by a hand more audacious than skilful. But, at whatever distance I may be below the greatest of humorists, I shall be satisfied to have utilized these little pieces of the stage-box of his work to show the modern hypocrite at work. That which most encouraged me in this difficult undertaking is to see it separated from every religious question, which was so injurious to the comedy of *Tartufe,* and which ought to be removed to-day. May the double significance of your names be a prophecy for the author, and may you be pleased to find here the expression of his respectful gratitude.

"De Balzac.

"January 1, 1844."

During the winter of 1844, Madame Hanska wrote a story and then threw it into the fire. In doing this she carried out a suggestion given her by Balzac several years before, when he wrote her that he liked to have a woman write and study, but she should have the courage to burn her productions. She told the novelist what she had done, and he requested her to rewrite her study and send it to him, and he would correct it and publish it under his name. In this way she could enjoy all the pleasures of authorship in reading what he would preserve of her beau-

tiful and charming prose. In the first place, she must paint a provincial family, and place the romantic, enthusiastic young girl in the midst of the vulgarities of such an existence; and then, by correspondence, *make a transit* to the description of a poet in Paris. A friend of the poet, who is to continue the correspondence, must be a man of decided talent, and the *dénouement* must be in his favor against the great poet. Also the manias and the asperities of a great soul which alarm and rebuff inferior souls should be shown; in doing this she would aid him in earning a few thousand francs.

Her story, in the hands of this great wizard, grew like a mushroom, without pain or effort, and soon developed into the romantic novel, *Modeste Mignon.* She had thrown her story into the fire, but the fire had returned it to him and given him power, as did the coal of fire on the lips of the great prophet, and he wished to give all the glory to his adored collaborator.

When reading this book, Madame Hanska objected to Balzac's having made the father of the heroine scold her for beginning a secret correspondence with an author, feeling that Balzac was disapproving of her conduct in writing to him first, but Balzac assured her that such was not his intention, and that he considered this *démarche* of hers as *royale and réginale.* Another trait, which she probably did not recognize, was that just as the great poet Canalis was at first indifferent to the letters of the heroine, and allowed Ernest de la Brière to answer them, so was Balzac rather indifferent to hers, and Madame Carraud — as already stated — is supposed to have replied to one of them.

There is no doubt that Balzac had his *Louloup* in mind while writing this story, for in response to the criticism that Modeste was too clever, he wrote Madame Hanska that she and her cousin Caliste who had served him as models for his heroine were superior to her. He first dedicated this work to her under the name of *une Étrangère,* but seeing the mistake the public made in ascribing this dedication to the Princesse Belgiojoso, he at a later date specified the nationality, and inscribed the book:

"To a Polish Lady:

"Daughter of an enslaved land, an angel in love, a demon in imagination, a child in faith, an old man in experience, a man in brain, a woman in heart, a giant in hope, a mother in suffering and a poet in your dreams, — this work, in which your love and your fancy, your faith, your experience, your suffering, your hopes and your dreams are like chains by which hangs a web less lovely than the poetry cherished in your soul — the poetry whose expression when it lights up your countenance is, to those who admire you, what the characters of a lost language are to the learned — this work is yours.

"De Balzac."

In *La fausse Maîtresse,* Balzac represented Madame Hanska in the rôle of the Countess Clémentine Laginska, who was silently loved by Thaddée Paz, a Polish refugee. This Thaddée Paz was no other than Thaddée Wylezynski, a cousin who adored her, and who died in 1844. Balzac learned of the warm attachment existing between Madame Hanska and her cousin soon after meeting her, and compared his faithful friend Borget to her Thaddée.

On hearing of the death of Thaddée, he writes her: "The death of Thaddée, which you announce to me, grieves me. You have told me so much of him, that I loved one who loved you so well, *although!* You have doubtless guessed why I called Paz, Thaddée. Poor dear one, I shall love you for all those whose love you lose!" [77]

Balzac longed to be free from his debts, and have undisturbed possession of *Les Jardies,* where they could live *en pigeons heureux.* Ever inclined to give advice, he suggested to her that she should have her interests entirely separate from Anna's, quoting the axiom, *N'ayez aucune collision d'intérêt avec vos enfants,* and that she was wrong in refusing a bequest from her deceased husband. She should give up all luxuries, dismiss all necessary employees and not spend so much of her income but invest it. He felt that she and her daughter were lacking in business ability; this proved to be too true, but Balzac was indeed a very poor person to advise her on this subject; however, her lack of accuracy in failing to date her letters was, to be sure, a great annoyance to him.

On the other hand, she suspected her *Noré,* had again heard that he was married, and that he was given to indulging in intoxicating liquors; she advised him not to associate so much with women.

Having eventually won her lawsuit, she returned to Wierzchownia in the spring of 1844, after a residence of almost two years in St. Petersburg. Her daughter Anna had made her début in St. Petersburg society, and had met the young Comte George de Mniszech, who was destined to become her husband. Balzac was not pleased

[77] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 442, October 11 (1844).

with this choice, and felt that the *protégé* of the aged Comte Potoçki would make a better husband, for moral qualities were to be considered rather than fortune.

After spending the summer and autumn at her home, Madame Hanska went to Dresden for the winter. As early as August, Balzac sought permission to visit her there, making his request in time to arrange his work in advance and secure the money for the journey, in case she consented. While in St. Petersburg, she had given him money to buy some gift for Anna, so he planned to take both of them many beautiful things, and *une cave de parfums* as a gift *de nez à nez.* If she would not consent to his coming to Dresden, he would come to Berlin, Leipsic, Frankfort, Aix-la-Chapelle, or anywhere else. He became impatient to know his fate, and her letters were so irregular that he exclaimed: "In heaven's name, write me regularly three times a month!" [78]

Poor Balzac's dream was to be on the way to Dresden, but this was not to be realized. It will be remembered that Madame Hanska's family did not approve of Balzac nor did they appreciate his literary worth, they felt that the marriage would be a decided *mésalliance,* and exerted their influence against him. Discouraged by them and her friends, she forbade his coming. While her family called him a *scribe exotique,* Balzac indirectly told her of the appreciation of other women, saying that Madame de Girardin considered him to be one of the most charming conversationalists of the day!

This uncertainty as to his going to visit his "Polar Star" affected him to such a degree that he could not con-

[78] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 2, p. 448 (October 21, 1844).

*By permission of Mr. J. P. Morgan*

Mme. Hanska

From a miniature made in 1820, the year of her first marriage, in the Morgan collection

centrate his mind on his work, and he became impatient to the point of scolding her:

"But, dear Countess, you have made me lose all the month of January and the first fifteen days of February by saying to me: 'I start — to-morrow — next week,' and by making me wait for letters; in short, by throwing me into rages which I alone know! This has brought a frightful disorder into my affairs, for instead of getting my liberty February 15, I have before me a month of herculean labor, and on my brain I must inscribe this which will be contradicted by my heart: 'Think no longer of your star, nor of Dresden, nor of travel; stay at your chain and work miserably! . . . Dear Countess, I decidedly advise you to leave Dresden at once. There are princesses in that town who infect and poison your heart, and were it not for *Les Paysans,* I should have started at once to prove to that venerable invalid of Cythera how men of my stamp love; men who have not received, like her prince, a Russian pumpkin in place of a French heart from the hands of hyperborean nature. . . . Tell your dear Princess that I have known you since 1833, and that in 1845 I am ready to go from Paris to Dresden to see you for a day; and it is not impossible for me to make this trip; . . ." [79]

In the meantime she had not only forbidden his coming to visit her, but had even asked him not to write to her again at Dresden, to which he replies:

"May I write without imprudence, before receiving a counter-order? Your last letter counseled me not to write again to Dresden. However, I take up my pen

[79] *Correspondance* 1819–1850, v. 2, p. 123, February 15, 1845.

on the invitation contained in your letter of the 8th. Since you, as well as your child, are absolutely determined to see your Lirette again, there is but one way for it, viz., to come to Paris."

He planned how she could secure a passport for Frankfort and the Rhine and meet him at Mayence, where he would have a passport for his sister and his niece so that they could come to Paris to remain from March 15 until May 15. Once in Paris, in a small suite of rooms furnished by him, they could visit Lirette at the convent, take drives, frequent the theaters, shop at a great advantage, and keep everything in the greatest secrecy. He continues:

"Dear Countess, the uncertainty of your arrival at Frankfort has weighed heavily on me, for how can I begin to work, whilst awaiting a letter, which may cause me to set out immediately? I have not written a line of the *Paysans*. From a material point of view, all this has been fatal to me. Not even your penetrating intelligence can comprehend this, as you know nothing of Parisian economy nor the difficulties in the life of a man who is trying to live on six thousand francs a year."[80]

Thus was his time wasted; and when he dared express gently and lovingly the feelings which were overpowering him, his beautiful *Châtelaine* was offended, and rebuked him for his impatience. Desperate and almost frantic, he writes her:

"Dresden and you dizzy me; I do not know what is

[80] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, pp. 224–226, February 15, 1845.

to be done. There is nothing more fatal than the indecision in which you have kept me for three months. If I had departed the first of January to return February 28, I should be more advanced (in work) and I would have had two good months at St. Petersburg. Dear sovereign star, how do you expect me to be able to conceive two ideas, to write two sentences, with my heart and head agitated as they have been since last November; it is enough to drive a man mad! I have drenched myself with coffee to no avail, I have only increased the nervous trouble of my eyes; . . . I am between two despairs, that of not seeing you, of not having seen you, and the financial and literary chagrin, the chagrin of self-respect. Oh! Charles II was quite right in saying: 'But She? . . .' in all matters which his ministers submitted to him." [81]

On receipt of a letter from her April 18, 1845, saying, "I desire much to see you," [82] he rushed off at once to Dresden, forgetful of all else. In July, Madame Hanska and her daughter accompanied him home, traveling incognito as Balzac's sister and his niece, just as he had planned. Anna is said to have taken the name of Eugénie, perhaps in remembrance of Balzac's heroine, Eugénie Grandet.[83] After stopping at various places on the way, they spent a few weeks at Paris. Balzac had prepared a little house in Passy near him for his friends, and

[81] *Correspondance* 1819–1850, v. 2, pp. 142, 143, April 10, 1845.

[82] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 235, April 18, 1845.

[83] For details, see de Lovenjoul, *La Genèse d'un roman de Balzac,* pp. 190, 191. M. F. de Roberto, *Le Amiche di Balzac, Nuova Antologia,* v. 82, p. 108, 1899, evidently did not think of this first visit to Paris when he said that Madame Hanska came only once to Paris, in 1847.

he took much pleasure in showing them his treasures and Paris. Their identity was not discovered, and in August he accompanied them as far as Brussels on their return to Dresden. There they met Count George Mniszech, the fiancé of Anna, who had been with them most of the time.

Balzac could scarcely control his grief at parting, but he was not separated from his *Prédilecta* long. The following month he spent several days with her at Baden-Baden, saying of this visit:

> "Baden has been for me a bouquet of sweet flowers without a thorn. We lived there so peacefully, so delightfully, and so completely heart to heart. I have never been so happy before in my life. I seemed to catch a glimpse of that future which I desire and dream of in the midst of my overwhelming labors. . . ." [84]

The happiness of Madame Hanska did not seem to be so great, for, ever uncertain, she consulted a fortune-teller about him. To this he replies: "Tell your fortune-teller that her cards have lied, and that I am not preoccupied with any blonde, except Dame Fortune." [85] As to whether she was justified in being suspicious, one can judge from the preceding pages. Balzac always denied or explained to her these accusations; however true were some of his vindications of himself, he certainly exaggerated in assuring her that he always told her the exact truth and never hid from her the smallest trifle whether good or bad.

In October, 1845, the novelist left Paris again, met his "Polar Star," her daughter and M. de Mniszech at

[84] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, p. 240, October 15, 1845.

Châlons, and accompanied them on their Italian tour by way of Marseilles as far as Naples. On his return to Marseilles on November 12, he invested in wonderful bargains in bric-à-brac, a favorite pursuit which eventually cost him a great deal in worry and time as well as much money. Madame Hanska had supplied his purse from time to time.

Although he was being pressed by debts and for unfinished work, having wasted almost the entire year and having had much extra expense in traveling, Balzac could not rise to the situation, and implored his *Châtelaine* to resign herself to keeping him near her, for he had done nothing since he left Dresden. In this frame of mind, he writes:

> "Nothing amuses me, nothing distracts me, nothing enlivens me; it is the death of the soul, the death of the will, the collapse of the entire being; I feel that I cannot take up my work until I see my life decided, fixed, settled. . . . I am quite exhausted; I have waited too long, I have hoped too much, I have been too happy this year, and I no longer wish anything else. After so many years of toil and misfortune, to have been free as a bird of the air, a thoughtless traveler, super-humanly happy, and then to come back to a dungeon! . . . is that possible? . . . I dream, I dream by day, by night; and my heart's thought, folding upon itself, prevents all action of the thought of the brain — it is fearful!" [85]

Balzac was ever seeking objects worthy to be placed in his art collection, going quietly through Paris on foot, and having his friend Méry continue to secure bargains

[85] *Correspondance*, 1819–1850, v. 2, p. 200, December 17, 1845.

at Marseilles. A most important event at this period is the noticeable decline in the novelist's health. Though these attacks of neuralgia and numerous colds were regarded as rather casual, had he not been so imbued with optimism — an inheritance from his father — he might have foreseen the days of terrible suffering and disappointment that were to come to him in Russia. Nature was beginning to revolt; the excessive use of coffee, the strain of long hours of work with little sleep, the abnormal life in general which he had led for so many years, and this suspense about the ultimate decision of the woman he so adored, were weakening him physically.

In January, 1846, Madame Hanska was in Dresden again, and as was always the case when in that city, she wrote accusing him. This time the charge was that of indulging in ignoble gossip, and the reproach was so unjust that, without finishing the reading of the letter, he exposed himself for hours in the streets of Paris to snow, to cold and to fatigue, utterly crushed by this accusation of which he was so innocent. In his delicate physical condition, such shocks were conducive to cardiac trouble, especially since his heart had long been affected. After perusing the letter to the end, he reflected that these grievous words came not from her, but from strangers, so he poured forth his burning adoration, his longing for a *home,* where he could drink long draughts of a life in common, the life of two.

In the following March the passionate lover was drawn by his *Prédilecta* to the Eternal City, and a few months later they were in Strasbourg, where a definite engagement took place. In October he joined her again, this

time at Wiesbaden, to attend the marriage of Anna to the Comte George de Mniszech. This brief visit had a delightful effect: "From Frankfort to Forbach, I existed only in remembrance of you, going over my four days like a cat who has finished her milk and then sits licking her lips." [86]

Madame Hanska had constantly refused to be separated from her daughter, but now Balzac hoped that he could hasten matters, so he applied to his boyhood friend, M. Germeau, prefect of Metz, to see if he, in his official capacity, could not waive the formality of the law and accelerate his marriage; [87] but since all Frenchmen are equal before the *état-civil,* this could not be accomplished.

It was during their extensive travels in 1846 that Balzac began calling the party "Bilboquet's troup of mountebanks": Madame Hanska became Atala; Anna, Zéphirine; George, Gringalet; and Balzac, Bilboquet. Although Madame Hanska cautioned him about his extravagance in gathering works of art, he persisted in buying them while traveling, so it became necessary to find a home in which to place his collection. It is an interesting fact that while making this collection, he was writing *Le Cousin Pons,* in which the hero has a passion for accumulating rare paintings and curios with which he fills his museum and impoverishes himself. Balzac had purposed calling this book *Le Parasite,* but Madame Hanska objected to this name, which smacked so strongly of the eighteenth century, and he changed it. As he was also writing *La Cou-*

[86] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 310, October 18, 1846.

[87] For other details, see *Revue des deux Mondes,* March 15, 1920, pp. 330–332.

*sine Bette* at this time, we can see not only that his power of application had returned to him, but that he was producing some of his strongest work.

For some time Balzac had been looking for a home worthy of his *fiancée* and had finally decided on the Villa Beaujon, in the rue Fortunée. Since this home was created " for her and by her," it was necessary for her to be consulted in the reconstruction and decoration of it, so he brought her secretly to Paris, and her daughter and son-in-law returned to Wierzchownia. This was not only a long separation for so devoted a mother and daughter, but there was some danger lest her incognito be discovered; Balzac, accordingly, took every precaution. It is easy to picture the extreme happiness of the novelist in conducting his *Louloup* over Paris, in having her near him while he was writing some of his greatest masterpieces, and, naturally, hoping that the everlasting debts would soon be defrayed and the marriage ceremony performed, but fortunately, he was not permitted to know beforehand of the long wait and the many obstacles that stood in his way.

Just what happened during the spring and summer of 1847 is uncertain, as few letters of this period exist in print. Miss Sandars (*Balzac,* p. 238), states that about the middle of April Balzac conducted Madame Hanska to Forbach on her return to Wierzchownia, and when he returned to Paris he found that some of her letters to him had been stolen, 30,000 francs being demanded for them at once, otherwise the letters to be turned over to the Czar. Miss Sandars states also that this trouble hastened the progress of his heart disease, and that when the letters were eventually secured (without the payment) Balzac

burned them, lest such a catastrophe should occur again. The Princess Radziwill says that the story of the letters was invented by Balzac and is ridiculous; also, that it angered her aunt because Balzac revealed his ignorance of Russian matters, by saying such things. Lawton (*Balzac,* p. 267) intimates that Balzac and Madame Hanska quarreled, she being jealous and suspicious of his fidelity, and that he burned her letters. De Lovenjoul (*Un Roman d'Amour,* p. 94) makes the same statement and adds that this trouble increased his heart disease. But he says also (*La Genèse d'un Roman de Balzac,* p. 194) that Madame Hanska spent two months secretly in Paris in April and May; yet, a letter written by Balzac, dated February 27, 1847, shows that she was in Paris at that time.

Balzac went to Wierzchownia in September, 1847, and traveled so expeditiously that he arrived there several days before his letter which told of his departure. When one remembers how he had planned with M. de Hanski more than ten years before to be his guest in this château, one can imagine his great delight now in journeying thither with the hope of accomplishing the great desire of his life. He was royally entertained at the château and was given a beautiful little suite of rooms composed of a salon, a sitting-room and a bed-room.[88]

Regarding the vital question of his marriage, he writes his sister:

> "My greatest wish and hope is still far from its accomplishment. Madame Hanska is indispensable to her

[88] This house, where all the mementos of Balzac, including his portrait, were preserved intact by the family, has been utterly destroyed by the Bolsheviks.

children; she is their guide; she disentangles for them the intricacies of the vast and difficult administration of this property. She has given up everything to her daughter. I have known of her intentions ever since I was at St. Petersburg. I am delighted, because the happiness of my life will thus be freed from all self-interest. It makes me all the more earnest to guard what is confided to me. . . . It was necessary for me to come here to make me understand the difficulties of all kinds which stand in the way of the fulfilment of my desires." [89]

During this visit, Balzac complained of the cold of Russia in January, but his friends were careful to provide him with suitable wraps. Business matters compelled him to return to Paris in February. In leaving this happy home, he must have felt the contrast in arriving in Paris during the Revolution, and having to be annoyed again with his old debts. This time, he went to his new home in the rue Fortunée, the home that had cost the couple so much money and was to cause him so much worry if not regret.

About the last of September, 1848, Balzac left Paris again for Russia, and his family did not hear from him for more than a month after his arrival. His mother was left with two servants to care for his house in the rue Fortunée, as he expected to return within a few months. It is worthy of note that in this first letter to her, he spoke of being in very good health, for immediately afterwards, he was seized with acute bronchitis, and was ill much of the time during his prolonged stay of eighteen months.

[89] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 327, 328, November 1847. The above shows that Balzac's ardent passion for his *Prédilecta* was for herself alone, and that he was not actuated by his greed for gold, as has been stated by various writers.

Madame Hanska planned to have him pay the debts on their future home as soon as the harvest was gathered, but concerning the most important question he writes:

> "The Countess will make up her mind to nothing until her children are entirely free from anxieties regarding their fortune. Moreover, your brother's debts, whether his own, or those he has in common with the family, trouble her enormously. Nevertheless, I hope to return toward the end of August; but in no circumstance will I ever again separate myself from the person I love. Like the Spartan, I intend to return with my shield or upon it." [90]

Things were very discouraging at Wierzchownia; Madame Hanska had failed to receive much money which she was to inherit from an uncle, and, in less than six weeks, four fires had consumed several farm houses and a large quantity of grain on the estate. Although they both were anxious to see the rue Fortunée, their departure was uncertain.

But the most distressing complication was the condition of Balzac's health, which was growing worse. He complained of the frightful Asiatic climate, with its excessive heat and cold; he had a perpetual headache, and his heart trouble had increased until he could not mount the stairs. But he had implicit faith in his physicians, and with his usual hopefulness felt that he would soon be cured, congratulating himself on having two such excellent physicians as Dr. Knothe and his son. His surroundings were

[90] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, p. 344, January 1849. Letter to Madame Surville.

ideal, and each of the household had for him an attachment tender, filial and sincere. It was necessary to his welfare that his life should be without vexation, and he asked his sister to entreat their mother to avoid anything which might cause him pain.

On his part, he tried to spare his mother also from unpleasant news, and desired his sister to assist him in concealing from her the real facts. He had had another terrible crisis in which he had been ill for more than a month with cephalalgic fever, and he had grown very thin.

Though several of Balzac's biographers have criticized Madame Hanska most bitterly for holding Balzac in Russia, and some have even gone so far as to censure her for his early death, it will be remembered that his health had long before begun to fail, and that no constitution could long endure the severe strain he had given his. No climate could help his worn-out body to a sufficient degree. Balzac himself praised the conduct of the entire Hanski family. The following is only one of his numerous testimonies to their devotion:

> "Alas! I have no good news to send. In all that regards the affection, the tenderness of all, the desire to root out the evil weeds which encumber the path of my life, mother and children are sublime; but the chief thing of all is still subject to entanglements and delays, which make me doubt whether it is God's will that your brother should ever be happy, at least in that way; but as regards sincere mutual love, delicacy and goodness, it would be impossible to find another family like this. We live together as if there were only one heart amongst

the four; this is repetition, but it cannot be helped, it is the only definition of the life I lead here." [91]

The situation of the author of the *Comédie humaine* was at this time most pitiable. Broken in health and living in a climate to which his constitution refused to be acclimated,[92] weighted down by a load of debt which he was unable to liquidate in his state of health (his work having amounted to very little during his stay in Russia), consumed with a burning passion for the woman who had become the overpowering figure in the latter half of his literary career, possessing a pride that was making him sacrifice his very life rather than give up his long-sought treasure, the diamond of Poland, his very soul became so imbued with this devouring passion that the poor *moujik* was scarcely master of himself.

His family were suffering various misfortunes, and these, together with his deplorable condition, caused Madame Hanska to contemplate giving up an alliance with a man whose family was so unfortunate and whose social standing was so far beneath hers. She preferred to remain in Russia where she was rich, and moved in a high aristocratic circle, rather than to give up her property

[91] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 367, 368, June 21, 1849. Letter to Madame Surville.

[92] Concerning the climate of Kieff, the Princess Radziwill says: "The story that the climate of Kieff was harmful to Balzac is also a legend. In that part of Russia, the climate is almost as mild as is the Isle of Wight, and Balzac, when he was staying with Madame Hanska, was nursed as he would never have been anywhere else, because not only did she love him with her whole heart, but her daughter and the latter's husband were also devoted to him."— Private papers of the present writer.

and assume the life of anxiety and trials which awaited her as Madame Honoré de Balzac.

At times he became most despondent; the long waiting was affecting him seriously, and he hesitated urging a life so shattered as was his upon the friend who, like a benignant star, had shone upon his path during the past sixteen years.

> "If I lose all I have hoped to gain here, I should no longer live; a garret in the rue Lesdiguières and a hundred francs a month would suffice for all I want. My heart, my soul, my ambition, all that is within me, desires nothing, except the one object I have had in view for sixteen years. If this immense happiness escapes me, I shall need nothing. I will have nothing. I care nothing for la rue Fortunée for its own sake; la rue Fortunée has only been created *for her* and *by her*." [93]

The novelist was cautious in his letters lest there should be gossip about his secret engagement, and his possibly approaching marriage. Apropos of his marriage, he would say that it was postponed for reasons which he could not give his family; Madame Hanska had met with financial losses again through fires and crop failures. With his continued illness, he had many things to trouble him.

But with all his trials, Balzac remained in many ways a child. After the terrible Moldavian fever which had endangered his life, in the fall of 1849 he took great pleasure in a dressing-gown of *termolana* cloth. He had

[93] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac*, v. 2, p. 361, March 1849. Letter to Madame Surville.

wanted one of these gowns since he first saw this cloth at Geneva in 1834. Again he was ill, for twenty days, and his only amusement was in seeing Anna depart for dances in costumes of royal magnificence. The Russian toilettes were wonderful, and while the women ruined their husbands with their extravagance, the men ruined the toilettes of the ladies by their roughness. In a mazurka where the men contended for ladies' handkerchiefs, the young Countess had one worth about five hundred francs torn in pieces, but her mother repaired the loss by giving her another twice as costly.

The year 1850, which was to prove so fatal to Balzac, opened with a bad omen, had he realized it. His health, which he had never considered as he should have done, was seriously affected, and early in January another illness followed which kept him in bed for several days. He thought that he had finally become acclimated, but after another attack a few weeks later he concluded that the climate was impossible for nervous temperaments.

Such was, in brief, the story of his stay in Russia, but his optimism and devotion continued, and he writes:

> "It is sanguine to think I could set off on March 15, and in that case I should arrive early in April. But if my long cherished hopes are realized, there would be a delay of some days, as I should have to go to Kieff, to have my passport regulated. These hopes have become possibilities; these four or five successive illnesses — the sufferings of a period of acclimatization — which my affection has enabled me to take joyfully, have touched this sweet soul more than the few little debts which remain unpaid have frightened her as a prudent woman,

and I foresee that all will go well. In the face of this happy probability, the journey to Kieff is not to be regretted, for the Countess has nursed me heroically without once leaving the house, so you ought not to afflict yourself for the little delay which will thus be caused. Even in that case, my, or our, arrival would be in the first fortnight of April." [94]

Until the very last, Balzac was very careful that his family should not announce his expected wedding. Finally, all obstacles overcome, the long desired marriage occurred March 14, 1850.[95] What must have been the novelist's feeling of triumph, after almost seventeen years of waiting, suffering and struggle, to write:

"Thus, for the last twenty-four hours there has been

[94] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 388, February 28, 1850. Letter to Madame de Balzac. For a beautiful, though perhaps colored, description of Madame Hanska's final decision not to allow Balzac to return alone, see Gabriel Ferry, *Balzac et ses Amies,* pp. 266–269.

[95] Though Balzac speaks of having to obtain the Czar's permission to marry, the Princess Radziwill states that no permission was required, asked or granted.

Balzac always gave March 14, 1850, as the date of his marriage, while de Lovenjoul (the *Bookman,* v. 15, p. 78, 1902) and M. Stanislas Rzewuski (*la Nouvelle Revue,* p. 202, January, 1906) give the date as April 15, 1850. The Princess Radziwill writes: "Concerning the date of Balzac's marriage, it was solemnized as he wrote it to his family, on March 2/14, 1850, at Berditcheff in Poland. Balzac, however, was a French subject, and as such had to be married according to the French civil law, by a French consul. There did not exist one in Berditcheff, so they had perforce to repair to Kieff for this ceremony. The latter took place on April 3/15 of the same year, and this explains the discrepancy of dates you mention, which dates refer to two different ceremonies."—Private papers of the present writer.

Queen Maria Leczinska

From the miniature by Jean Baptiste van Loo,
in the Morgan collection

a Madame Ève de Balzac, née Countess Rzewuska, or a Madame Honoré de Balzac, or a Madame de Balzac the elder. This is no longer a secret, as you see I tell it to you without delay. The witnesses were the Countess Mniszech, the son-in-law of my wife, the Count Gustave Olizar, brother-in-law of the Abbé Czarouski, the envoy of the Bishop; and the curé of the parish of Berditcheff. The Countess Anna accompanied her mother, both exceedingly happy . . ."![96]

With great joy and childish pride, Balzac informed his old friend and physician, Dr. Nacquart, who knew so well of his adoration for his "Polar Star" and his seventeen long years of untiring pursuit, that he had become the husband of the grandniece of Marie Leczinska[97] and the

[96] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, p. 392, March 15, 1850. Letter to Madame Surville. M. Paul Flat, *Seconds Essais sur Balzac,* p. 78, is, of course, mistaken in his dates when he states that after eleven years of adoration, Balzac married Madame Hanska in 1846.

[97] Queen Marie Leczinska (correctly written Leszczinska) was the daughter of Queen Catherine Opalinska, who was the daughter of Ursula Eléonora Rzewuska, a sister of Waclaw Rzewuski; he was the great grandfather of Madame Hanska and the great uncle of Queen Marie. On the occasion of the latter's marriage with Louis XV, Madame Hanska's family received from the King the official title of *Cousins du Roi,* which was very much prized in the old days of the French Monarchy. Madame Hanska's relationship to the Queen was rather distant since it was the Queen's grandmother who was the great aunt of Madame Hanska, and the Queen herself was cousin twice removed to Madame Hanska's father; but Balzac with his imagination of course saw himself at once nephew of all the Bourbon kings, past, present, and future. The Duchesse d'Angoulême, daughter of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, recognized this relationship, however, and addressed Madame Hanska's father as *Mon Cousin,* and the Comte de Chambord (grandson of Charles X) whom Madame Hanska's brother used to visit every

brother-in-law of an aide-de-camp general of His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, the Count Adam Rzewuski, step-father of Count Orloff; the nephew of the Countess Rosalia Rzewuska, first lady of honor to Her Majesty the Empress; the brother-in-law of Count Henri Rzewuski, the Walter Scott of Poland as Mizkiewicz is the Polish Lord Byron; the father-in-law of Count Mniszech, of one of the most illustrious houses of the North, etc., etc.!

Though this was by far and away Balzac's greatest and most passionate love, the present writer cannot agree with the late Professor Harry Thurston Peck in the following dictum: "It was his first real love, and it was her last; and, therefore, their association realized the very characteristic aphorism which Balzac wrote in a letter to her after he had known her but a few short weeks: 'It is only the last love of a woman that can satisfy the first love of a man.'" [98]

After their marriage, the homeward journey was delayed several weeks. The baggage, which was to be conveyed by wagon, only left April 2, and it required about two weeks for it to reach Radziwiloff, owing to the general thaw just set in. Then Balzac had a severe relapse due to lung trouble, and it was twelve days before he recovered sufficiently to travel. He had an attack of ophthalmia at Kieff, and could scarcely see; the Countess Anna fell ill with the measles, and her mother would not

year at Frohsdorf, Austria, always treated him as a member of his family. According to the French way of acknowledging relationships, Queen Marie was *tante à la mode de Bretagne* of Madame Hanska.

[98] *Balzac and his Work*, p. 10.

leave until the Countess recovered. They started late in April for what proved to be a terrible journey, he suffering from heart trouble, and she from rheumatism. On the way they stopped for a few days at Dresden, where Balzac became very ill again. His eyes were in such a condition that he could no longer see the letters he wrote. The following, written from Dresden, gives a glimpse of their troubles:

> "We have taken a whole month to go a distance usually done in six days. Not once, but a hundred times a day, our lives have been in danger. We have often been obliged to have fifteen or sixteen men, with levers, to get us out of the bottomless mudholes into which we had sunk up to the carriage-doors. . . . At last, we are here, alive, but ill and tired. Such a journey ages one ten years, for you can imagine what it is to fear killing each other, or to be killed the one by the other, loving each other as we do. My wife feels grateful for all you say about her, but her hands do not permit her to write. . . ." [99]

Madame de Balzac has been most severely criticized for her lack of affection for Balzac, and their married life has generally been conceded to have been very unhappy. This supposition seems to have been based largely on hearsay. Miss Sandars quotes from a letter written to her daughter on May 16 from Frankfort, in which, speaking of Balzac as "poor dear friend," she seems to be quite ignorant of his condition, and to show more interest in her necklace than in her husband. The present writer has

[99] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 402, 403, May 11, 1850. Letter to Madame Surville.

not seen this *unpublished* letter; but a *published* letter dated a few days before the other, in which she not only refers to Balzac as her husband but shows both her affection for him and her interest in his condition, runs as follows:

> "Hotel de Russie (Dresden). My husband has just returned; he has attended to all his affairs with a remarkable activity, and we are leaving to-day. I did not realize what an adorable being he is; I have known him for seventeen years, and every day, I perceive that there is a new quality in him which I did not know. If he could only enjoy health! Speak to M. Knothe about it, I beg you. You have no idea how he suffered last night! I hope his natal air will help him, but if this hope fails me, I shall be much to be pitied, I assure you. It is such happiness to be loved and protected thus. His eyes are also very bad; I do not know what all that means, and at times, I am very sad. I hope to give you better news to-morrow, when I shall write you."[1]

Comments have been made on the fact that Balzac wrote his sister his wife's hands were too badly swollen from rheumatism to write and yet she wrote to her daughter; but there is a difference between a mother's letter to her only child, and one to a mother-in-law as hostile as she knew hers to be. She probably did not care to write, and Balzac, to smooth matters for her, gave this excuse.

The long awaited but tragic arrival took place late in the night of May 20, 1850. The home in the rue Fortunée was brilliantly lighted, and through the windows could be

[1] *L'Intermédiaire des Chercheurs et Curieux,* November 30, 1912, p. 704. Letter from Madame Honoré de Balzac to her daughter, the Countess de Mniszech, May 9, 1850.

seen the many beautiful flowers arranged in accordance with his oft repeated request to his poor old mother. But alas! to their numerous tugs at the door-bell no response came, so a locksmith had to be sent for to open the doors. The minutest details of Balzac's orders for their reception had been obeyed, but the unfortunate, faithful François Munch, under the excitement and strain of the preparations, had suddenly gone insane.

Was this a sinister omen, or was it an exemplification of the old Turkish proverb, "The house completed, death enters"? Our hero's marriage proved to be the last of his *illusions perdues,* for only three months more were to be granted him. MM. Hanotaux et Vicaire have pertinently remarked that five years before his death, Balzac closed *Les petites Misères de la Vie conjugal* with these prophetic words: "Who has not heard an Italian opera of some kind in his life? . . . You must have noticed, then, the musical abuse of the word *felichitta* lavished by the librettist and the chorus at the time every one is rushing from his box or leaving his stall. Ghastly image of life. One leaves it the moment the *felichitta* is heard." After so many years of waiting and struggle, he attained the summit of happiness, but was to obey the summons of death and leave this world just as the chorus was singing "*felichitta.*"

Some of Balzac's biographers have criticized Madame Honoré de Balzac not only for having been heartless and indifferent towards him, but for having neglected him in his last days on earth. Her nephew, M. Stanislas Rzewuski, defended her, he said, not because she was his aunt but because of the injustice done to the memory of this

poor *étrangère,* whose faithful tenderness, admiration and devotion had comforted the earthly exile of a man of genius. Balzac, realizing his hopeless condition, was despondent; his hopes were blighted, and his physical sufferings doubtless made him irritable. On the other hand, Madame de Balzac, however seductive and charming, however worthy of being adored and being his "star," had a high temper. This was the natural temper of an aristocratic woman. It never passed the limits of decorum, but it was violent and easily provoked.[2] Then too, she had been accustomed to luxury and had never known poverty. She was ill also and probably disappointed in life.

M. Rzewuski has resented, and doubtless justly so, the oft-quoted death scene drawn by Victor Hugo. He says that at such a time the great poet was perhaps a most unwelcome guest and she had left the room to avoid him; that she probably returned before Balzac's last moments came; that Hugo was only there a short while; that if she did not return she could not have known that this was to be Balzac's last night on earth, and that, worn out with watching and waiting, she was justified in retiring to seek a much needed rest.[3]

[2] The Princess Radziwill states that there are several inaccuracies in this article by her half-brother. He was very young when their aunt died, and he was influenced by his mother, who never liked Madame de Balzac. She points out that her aunt's temper was most even, that she never heard her raise her voice, and only once saw her angry.

[3] As to Octave Mirbeau's calumnious story, denied by both the Countess Mniszech and Gigoux's nephew and heir, the Princess Radziwill states that when Balzac died, her aunt did not know Gigoux and had never seen him. He was introduced to her only

The story is told that when Dr. Nacquart informed Balzac that he must die, the novelist exclaimed: "Go call Bianchon! Bianchon will save me! Bianchon!" The Princess Radziwill states, however, that she has heard her aunt say often that this story is not true. But were it true, Balzac's condition was such that no physician could have saved him, even though possessing all the ability portrayed by the novelist in the notable and omnipresent Dr. Horace Bianchon, who had saved so many characters of the *Comédie humaine,* who had comforted in their dying hours all ranks from the poverty-stricken Père Goriot to the wealthy Madame Graslin, from the corrupt Madame Marneffe to the angelic Pierette Lorrain, whose incomparable fame had spread over a large part of Europe.

Madame Hanska has been reproached also for the medical treatment given Balzac in Russia. It is doubtless true that lemon juice is not considered the proper treatment for heart disease in this enlightened age, but seventy years ago, in the wilds of Russia, there was probably no better medical aid to be secured; and even if Dr. Knothe and his son were "charlatans," it will be remembered that Balzac not only had a *penchant* for such, but that he was very fond of these two physicians and thought their treatment superior to that which was given at Paris.

M. de Fiennes complained that grass was allowed to grow on Balzac's grave. To this M. Eugène de Mirecourt replied that what M. de Fiennes had taken for grass was laurel, thyme, buckthorn and white jasmine; the grave of Balzac was constantly and religiously kept in

in 1860 by her daughter, who asked him to paint her mother's portrait, and they became good friends.— Private papers of the present writer.

good order by his widow. One could ask any of the gardeners of Père-Lachaise thereupon.

Whatever the attitude of Balzac's wife towards him during his life, she acted most nobly indeed in the matter of his debts. Instead of accepting the inheritance left her in her husband's will and selling her rights in all his works, the beautiful *étrangère* accepted courageously the terrible burden left to her, and paid the novelist's mother an annuity of three thousand francs until her death, which occurred March, 1854. She succeeded in accomplishing this liquidation, which was of exceptional difficulty, and long before her death every one of Balzac's creditors had been paid in full.

There seems to be no *authoritative* proof that Balzac's married life was either happy or unhappy. The Princess Radziwill always understood from her aunt that they were as happy as one could expect, considering that Balzac's days were numbered. The present writer is fain to say, with Mr. Edward King: "He died happy, for he died in the full realization of a pure love which had upheld him through some of the bitterest trials that ever fall to the lot of man." [4]

> "Say to your dear child the most tenderly endearing things in the name of one of the most sincere and faithful friends she will ever have, not excepting her husband, for I love her as her father loved her." [5]

[4] *Balzac, Westminster Review,* November 1911, p. 531.

[5] *Correspondance,* 1819–1850, v. 2, p. 130, February 15, 1845. The Countess Mniszech died in September, 1914, at the age of eighty-nine, so must have been born about 1825 or 1826. She spent the twenty-five years preceding her demise in a convent in the rue de Vaugirard in Paris, and retained her right mind until the day of her

Balzac was probably never more sincere than when he wrote this message, for perhaps no father ever loved his own child more devotedly than he loved Anna, the only child living of M. and Mme. de Hanski.

Most of Balzac's biographers who state that he met Madame Hanska on the promenade, say that her little daughter was with her. Wherever he first met her, she won his heart completely. Some pebbles she gathered during his first visit to her mother at Neufchâtel, Balzac had made into a little cross, on the back of which was engraved: *adoremus in aeternum.* She was at this time about seven or eight years of age. When he visited them again at Geneva, their friendship increased, and in writing to her mother he sent the child kisses from *son pauvre cheval.* He loved her little playthings, some of which he kept on his desk; was always wanting to send her gifts, anxious for her health and happiness, took great interest in her musical talent, and was ever delighted to hear of her progress or pleasures. One of his rather typical messages to her in her earlier years was: "Place a kiss on Anna's brow from the most tranquil steed she will ever have in her stables." [6]

As she grew older, the novelist thought of dedicating one of his works to her, and wrote to her mother that the first *young girl* story he should compose he would like to dedicate to Anna, if agreeable to both of them. The mother's consent was granted, and he assured her that the

death. It will always be one of the greatest regrets of the present writer that she did not know of this before the Countess's death, for the Countess could doubtless have given her much information not to be obtained elsewhere.

[6] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 411, July 8, 1837.

story *Pierrette* (written, by the way, in ten days) was suitable for Anna to read. "*Pierrette* is one of those tender flowers of melancholy which in advance are certain of success. As the book is for Anna, I do not wish to tell you anything about, it, but leave you the pleasure of surprise." [7]

"To Mademoiselle Anna de Hanska:

"Dear Child, you, the joy of an entire home, you whose white or rose-colored scarf flutters in the summer through the groves of Wierzchownia, like a will-o'-the-wisp, followed by the tender eyes of your father and mother — how can I dedicate to you a story full of melancholy? But is it not well to tell you of sorrow such as a young girl so fondly loved as you are will never know? For some day your fair hands may comfort the unfortunate. It is so difficult, Anna, to find in the history of our manners any incident worthy of meeting your eye, that an author has no choice; but perhaps you may discern how happy you are from reading this story, sent by

"Your old friend,

"De Balzac."

Balzac was very proud of the success of *Pierrette,* and wished Madame Hanska to have Anna read it, assuring her that there was nothing "improper" in it.

"*Pierrette* has appeared in the *Siècle.* The manu-

[7] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 522, October 30, 1839. M. Eugène de Mirecourt (*Les Contemporains, Balzac,* p. 49) is, of course, mistaken in saying that *Pierrette* is dedicated to Madame Hanska. M. Edmond Pilon (*Les Dédicaces dans l'œuvre de Balzac, Revue Politique et Littéraire,* p. 71, 1902), also is mistaken in saying that Anna is the niece of Madame Hanska.

script is bound for Anna. *L'envoi* has appeared; I enclose it to you. Friends and enemies proclaim this little book a masterpiece; I shall be glad if they are not mistaken. You will read it soon, as it is being printed in book form. People have placed it beside the *Recherche de l'Absolu*. I am willing. I myself would like to place it beside Anna." [8]

After the death of Anna's father, Balzac advised her mother in many ways. His interest in Anna's musical ability, which was very rare, increased and he had Liszt call on Madame Hanska and play for them when he went to St. Petersburg. He expressed his gratitude to Liszt for this favor by dedicating to him *La Duchesse de Langeais*. He regretted this later, after the musician fell into such discredit.

Balzac was anxious that Madame Hanska should manage the estate wisely, and that she should be very careful in selecting a husband for Anna. The young girl had many suitors at St. Petersburg, and he expressed his opinion freely about them. He wanted her to be happily married, and wrote her mother regarding the essential qualities of a husband. He loved Anna for her mother's sake as well as for her own, and when the fond mother wrote him about certain traits of her daughter he encouraged her to be proud of Anna, for she was far superior to the best-bred young people of Paris.

He did not approve, at first, of the young Count de Mniszech and championed another suitor; later he and the Count became warm friends, and in 1846, he dedi-

[8] *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, v. 1, p. 528, February 1840. The dedication was placed at the end, *en envoi*.

cated to him *Maître Cornelius,* written in 1831. Besides having a very handsome cane made for him, he sent him many gifts.

Balzac expressed his admiration of Anna not only to her mother, but to others. He wrote the Count, who was soon to become her husband, that she was the most charming young girl he had ever seen in the most refined circles of society. He found her far more attractive than his niece, who had the bloom of a beautiful Norman, and he thought that possibly some of his admiration for her was due to his great affection for her mother.

One is surprised to see what foresight Balzac had — so many things he said proved to be true. He thought, for instance, that Anna had the physique to live a hundred years, that she had no sense of the practical, that her mother — as he took care to warn her — would do well to keep her estate separate from her daughter's, or otherwise she might some day have cause for regret. Whether Madame Honoré de Balzac was too busy with literary and business duties after her husband's death, or whether her extreme affection prevented her refusing her only child anything she wished, the results were disastrous. It was fortunate for Balzac that he did not live to see the fate of his paragon, for this would have grieved him deeply, while he probably would not have been able to remedy matters.

While a part of Balzac's affection for Anna was doubtless owing to his adoration for her mother, she must have had in her own person some very charming traits, for after he had lived in their home for more than a year, where he must have studied her most carefully, he says of her: "It is true that the Countess Anna and Count

George are two ideal perfections; I did not believe two such beings could exist. There is a nobleness of life and sentiment, a gentleness of manners, an evenness of temper, which cannot be believed unless you have lived with them. With all this, there is a playfulness, a spontaneous gaiety, which dispels weariness or monotony. Never have I been so thoroughly in my right place as here." [9]

Balzac certainly was not tactful in continually praising the young Countess to his sister and his nieces, but he was doubtless sincere, and no record has been found of his ever having changed his opinion of this young Russian whom he loved so tenderly.

A woman who played an important rôle in Balzac's association with Madame Hanska was Mademoiselle Henriette Borel, called Lirette. She had been governess in the home of Madame Hanska since 1824. Sympathetic and devoted to the children, she grieved when death took them. She helped save Anna's life, for which the entire family loved her. It was doubtless due to her influence that M. de Hanski and his family chose Neufchâtel, her home city, as a place to sojourn. They arrived there in the summer of 1833, and left early in October of the same year. While at Neufchâtel they were very gracious to Lirette's relatives and Madame Hanska invited them to visit her at Geneva.

Whether Lirette wrote with her own hand the first letters sent by Madame Hanska to Balzac — letters which de Lovenjoul says were not in the handwriting of the

[9] *Memoir and Letters of Balzac,* v. 2, pp. 381, 382, November 29, 1849. Letter to Madame Surville.

*Prédilecta* — we shall probably never know, but that she knew of the secret correspondence and aided in it is seen from the following:

> "My celestial love, find an impenetrable place for my letters. Oh! I entreat you, let no harm come to you. Let Henriette be their faithful guardian, and make her take all the precautions that the genius of woman dictates in such a case. . . . Do not deceive yourself, my dear Eve; one does not return to Mademoiselle Henriette Borel a letter so carefully folded and sealed without looking at it. There are clever dissimulations. Now I entreat you, take a carriage that you may never get wet in going to the post. . . . Go every Wednesday, because the letters posted here on Sunday arrive on Wednesday. I will never, whatever may be the urgency, post letters for you on any day except Sunday. Burn the envelopes. Let Henriette scold the man at the post-office for having delivered a letter which was marked *poste restante,* but scold him laughing, . . ." [10]

Balzac courteously sent greetings to Lirette in his letters to Madame Hanska, and evidently liked her. Her religious tendencies probably impressed him many years before she took the veil, for he writes of her praying for him.

While Balzac naturally met Lirette in his visits to Madame Hanska, it was while he was at St. Petersburg in the summer of 1843 that he became more intimate with her, for she had decided to become a nun, and consulted him on many points. Since she was to enter a convent at Paris, he visited a priest there for her, secured the

[10] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 48, 58, October 6, 26, 1833.

necessary documents, and advised her about many matters, especially her property and the convent she should enter. Though he aided her in every way he could, he did not approve of this step, but when she arrived in Paris, he entertained her in his home, giving up his room for her. At various times he went with her to the convent and his housekeeper, Madame de Brugnolle, also was very kind to her.

Lirette impressed the novelist as being very stupid, and he wondered how his " Polar Star " could have ever made a friend of her. She was as blind a Catholic as she had been a blind Protestant. She seemed willing now to have him marry Madame Hanska, after many years of aversion to him. He tried to impress upon her that a rich nun was much better treated than a poor one, but she would not listen to him, and insisted on making what he considered a premature donation of everything she possessed to her convent. She annoyed him very much while he was trying to save her property, yet he was pleased to do this for the sake of his *Prédilecta* and Anna. He looked after her with the same solicitude that a father would have for his child, and after doing everything possible for her, he conducted her to the *Convent de la Visitation* without a word of thanks from her, though he had made sacrifices for her, and though his housekeeper had slept on a mattress on the floor, giving up her room in order that Lirette should have suitable quarters. But although hurt by her ingratitude he had enjoyed talking with her, for she brought him news from his friends in Russia.

Lirette evidently did not realize what she was doing in the matter of the convent, and was displeased with many

things after entering it. Balzac was vexed at what she wrote to Madame Hanska, but felt that she was not altogether responsible for her actions, believing that it was a very personal sentiment which caused her to enter the convent.[11] He could not understand her indifference to her friends; she did penance by keeping a letter from Anna eighteen days before opening it. He found her stupidity unequaled, but he sent his housekeeper to see her, and visited her himself when he had time.

In addition to all this, the poor novelist had one more trial to undergo; this was to see her take the vows (December 2, 1845). He was misinformed as to the time of the ceremony, so went too soon and wasted much precious time, but he remained through the long service in order to see her afterwards. But in all this Lirette was to accomplish one thing for him. As she had helped in his correspondence, she was soon to be the means of bringing him and his *Châtelaine* together again; the devotion of Madame Hanska and Anna to the former governess being such that they came to Paris to see her.

In the home of the de Hanskis in the Russian waste were two other women, Mesdemoiselles Séverine and

[11] It has been stated that Mademoiselle Borel was so impressed by the chants, lights and ceremony at the funeral of M. de Hanski in November 1841, that it caused her to give up her Protestant faith and enter the convent. Miss Sandars (*Balzac,* p. 127) has well remarked: "We may wonder, however, whether tardy remorse for her deceit toward the dead man, who had treated her with kindness, had not its influence in causing this sudden religious enthusiasm, and whether the Sister in the Convent of the Visitation in Paris gave herself extra penance for her sins of connivance."

Mademoiselle Borel died in this convent, rue d'Enfer, in 1857.

Denise Wylezynska, who were to play a small part in Balzac's life. Both of these relatives probably came with M. de Hanski and his family to Switzerland in 1833; their names are mentioned frequently in his letters to Madame Hanska, and soon after his visit at Neufchâtel the novelist asks that Mademoiselle Séverine preserve her gracious indifference. These ladies were cousins of M. de Hanski, and probably were sisters of M. Thaddée Wylezynski, mentioned in connection with Madame Hanska. After her husband's death, Madame Hanska must have invited these two ladies to live with her, for Balzac inquires about the two young people she had with her.

Mademoiselle Denise has been suspected of having written the first letter for Madame Hanska, and the dedication of *La Grenadière* has been replaced by the initials "A. D. W.," supposed to mean "à Denise Wylezynska"; the actual dedication is an unpublished correction of Balzac himself.

The relative that caused Balzac the most discomfort was the Countess Rosalie Rzewuska, née Princess Lubomirska, wife of Count Wenceslas Rzewuski, Madame Hanska's uncle. She seems to have been continually hearing either that he was married, or something that was detrimental, and kept him busy denying these reports:

> "I have here your last letter in which you speak to me of Madame Rosalie and of *Séraphita*. Relative to your aunt, I confess that I am ignorant by what law it is that persons so well bred can believe such calumnies. I, a gambler! Can your aunt neither reason, calculate nor combine anything except whist? I, who work, even here, sixteen hours a day, how should I go to a gambling-

house that takes whole nights? It is as absurd as it is crazy. . . . Your letter was sad; I felt it was written under the influence of your aunt. . . . Let your aunt judge in her way of my works, of which she knows neither the whole design nor the bearing; it is her right. I submit to all judgments. . . . Your aunt makes me think of a poor Christian who, entering the Sistine chapel just as Michael-Angelo has drawn a nude figure, asks why the popes allow such horrors in Saint Peter's. She judges a work from at least the same range in literature without putting herself at a distance and awaiting its end. She judges the artist without knowing him, and by the sayings of ninnies. All that gives me little pain for myself, but much for her, if you love her. But that you should let yourself be influenced by such errors, that does grieve me and makes me very uneasy, for I live by my friendships only." [12]

In spite of this, Balzac wished to obtain the good will of "Madame Rosalie," and sympathized with her when she lost her son. But she had a great dislike for Paris, and after the death of M. de Hanski, she objected to her niece's going there. The novelist felt that she was his sworn enemy, and that she went too far in her hatred of everything implied in the word *Paris* [13]; yet he pardoned her for the sake of her niece.

It was Caliste Rzewuska, the daughter of this aunt, whom Balzac had in mind when he sketched *Modeste Mig-*

[12] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 334–336, June, 1836.

[13] The reason why Madame Rosalie had such a horror of Paris was that her mother was guillotined there,— the same day as Madame Elizabeth. Madame Rosalie was only a child at that time, and was discovered in the home of a washerwoman.

*non.* She was married to M. Michele-Angelo Cajetani, Prince de Teano and Duc de Sermoneta, to whom *Les Parents pauvres* is dedicated.

Balzac seems to have had something of the same antipathy for Madame Hanska's sister Caroline that he had for her aunt Rosalie, but since he wrote to his *Prédilecta* many unfavorable things of a private nature about his family, she may have done the same concerning hers, so that he may not have had a fair opportunity of judging her. He was friendly towards her at times, and she is the Madame Cherkowitch of his letters.

It was probably Madame Hanska's sister Pauline, Madame Jean Riznitch, whose servants were to receive a reward from a rich *moujik* in case they could arrange to have him see Balzac. This *moujik* was a great admirer of the novelist, had read all his books, burnt a candle to Saint Nicholas for him every week, and was anxious to meet him. Since Madame Riznitch lived not far from Madame Hanska, he hoped to see Balzac when he visited Wierzschownia.

The relative whose association with Balzac seems to have caused Madame Hanska the most discomfort was her cousin, the Countess Marie Potoçka. He met her when he visited his *Châtelaine* in Geneva, where the Countess Potoçka entertained him, and after his return to Paris, he called on Madame Appony, wife of the Austrian ambassador, to deliver a letter for her. Before going to Geneva he had heard of her, and had confused her identity with that of the *belle Grècque* who had died several years before.

During his visit at Geneva the novelist deemed it wise

to explain his attentions to Madame P——: "It would have seemed ridiculous (to the others) for me to have occupied myself with you only. I was bound to respect you, and in order to talk to you so much, it was necessary for me to talk to Madame P——. What I wrote you this morning is of a nature to show you how false are your fears. I never ceased to look at you while talking to Madame P——." [14]

After his return to Paris he wrote a letter to Madame P——, and was careful to explain this also:

> "Do not be jealous of Madame P——'s letter; that woman must be *for us*. I have flattered her, and I want her to think that you are disdained. . . . My enemies are spreading a rumor of my *liaison* with a Russian princess; they name Madame P—— . . . Oh! my love, I swear to you I wrote to Madame P—— only to prevent the road to Russia being closed to me." [15]

He received a letter from her which he did not answer, for he wished to end this correspondence. It is within the bounds of possibility that Balzac cared more for the Countess Potoçka than he admitted to his "Polar Star," but several years later, when she became avaricious, he formed an aversion to her and warned Madame Hanska to beware of her cousin.

[14] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, p. 106, January, 1834.

[15] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 135, 138, February 22, March 9, 1834.

# CONCLUSION

" I live by my friendships only." [1]

Many people write their romances, others live them; Honoré de Balzac did both. This life so full of romantic fiction mingled with stern reality, where the burden of debt is counter-balanced by dramatic passion, where hallucination can scarcely be distinguished from fact, where the weary traveler is ever seeking gold, rest, or love, ever longing to be famous and to be loved, where the hero, secluded as in a monastery, suddenly emerges to attend an opera, dressed in the most gaudy attire, where he lacks many of the comforts of life, yet suddenly crosses half the continent, allured by the fascinations of a woman, this life is indeed a *roman balzacien par excellence!*

He tried to shroud his life, especially his association with women, in mystery. Now since the veil is partially lifted, one can see how great was the rôle they played. It has been said [2] that twelve thousand letters were written to Balzac by women, some to express their admiration, some to recognize themselves in a delightful personage he had created, others to thank him or condemn him for certain attitudes he had sustained towards woman.

For him to have so thoroughly understood the feminine

[1] *Lettres à l'Étrangère,* v. 1, pp. 334–336, June, 1836.

[2] De Lovenjoul, *Une Page perdue de H. de Balzac,* pp. 308–310. Chapter by Louis Lurine.

mind and temperament, to have given to this subtle chameleon its various hues, to have portrayed woman with her many charms and caprices, and to have described woman in her various classes and at all ages, he must have observed her, or rather, he must have known her. He very justly says in his *Avant-propos:*

> "When Buffon describes the lion, he dismisses the lioness with a few phrases; but in society the wife is not always the female of the male. There may be two perfectly dissimilar beings in one household. The wife of a shopkeeper is sometimes worthy of a prince, and the wife of a prince is often worthless compared with the wife of an artisan. The social state has freaks which are not found in the natural world; it is nature *plus* society. The description of the social species would thus be at least double that of the animal species, merely in view of the two sexes."

Thus, he made a special study of woman, penetrated, like a father confessor, into her innermost secrets, and if he has not painted the duchesses with the delicacy due them, it was not because he did not know or had not studied them, but probably because he was picturing them with his Rabelaisian pen.[3]

He knew many women who were active during the reign of Louis XVI, women who were conspicuous under the Empire, and women who were prominent in society during the Restoration, hence, one would naturally expect to find traces of them in his works.

[3] For a very sharp criticism of Balzac's ability to portray the woman of the nobility, see É. Faguet, *Balzac,* and for an equally bitter reply to him, see Marcel Barrière, *L'Œuvre de Balzac,* pp. 479–482.

But it is not only this type of woman that Balzac has presented. He painted the *bourgeoise* in society, as seen in the daughters of *Père Goriot,* and many others, the various types of the *vieille fille* such as Mademoiselle Zéphirine Guénic (*Béatrix*) who never wished to marry, Cousine Bette who failed in her matrimonial attempts, and Madame Bousquier (*La vieille Fille*) who finally succeeded in hers.

The working class is represented in such characters as Madame Rémonencq (*Le Cousin Pons*) and Madame Cardinal (*Les petits Bourgeois*), while the servant class is well shown in the person of the *grande* Nanon (*Eugénie Grandet*), the faithful Fanny (*La Grenadière*), and many others. As has been seen, there is a trace of his old servant, Mère Comin, in the person of Madame Vaillant (*Facino Cane*), and Mère Cognette and La Rabouilleuse (*La Rabouilleuse*) are said to be people he met while visiting Madame Carraud. The novelist must have known many such women, for his mother and sisters had servants, and in the homes of Madame de Berny, Madame Carraud and Madame de Margonne, he certainly knew the servants, not to mention those he observed at the cafés and in his wanderings.

Balzac knew several young girls at different periods of his life. His sister Laure was his first and only companion in his earlier years, and he knew his sister Laurence especially well in the years immediately preceding her marriage. Madame Carraud was a schoolmate of Madame Surville and visited in his home as a young girl. He was not only acquainted with the various daughters of Madame de Berny, but at one time there was some

prospect of his marrying Julie. Joséphine and Constance, daughters of Madame d'Abrantès, were acquaintances of his during their early womanhood. He must have known Mademoiselle de Trumilly as he presented himself as her suitor, and being entertained in her home frequently, doubtless saw her sisters also. Since he accompanied his sister to balls in his youth, it is natural to suppose that he met young girls there, even if there is no record of it.

A few years later he became devoted to the two daughters of his sister Laure, and lived in her home for a short time. He knew Madame Hanska's daughter Anna in her childhood, but was most intimate with her when she was about twenty. While Madame de Girardin was not so young, he met her several years before her marriage, called her Delphine, and regarded her somewhat as his pupil. He liked Marie de Montheau and her mother, Camille Delannoy, who was a friend of his sister Laure and the daughter of the family friend, Madame Delannoy. Though not intimate with her, he met and observed Eugénie, the daughter of Madame de Bolognini at Milan, and probably was acquainted with Inez and Hyacinthe, the two daughters of Madame Desbordes-Valmore.

In his various works, he has portrayed quite a number of young girls varying greatly in rank and temperament, among the most prominent being Marguerite Claës (*La Recherche de l'Absolu*), noted for her ability and her strength of character, headstrong and much petted Emilie de Fontaine (*Le Bal de Sceaux*), Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, the very zealous Royalist (*Une ténébreuse Affaire*), romantic Modeste Mignon, pitiable Pierrette Lorrain, dutiful and devout Ursule Mirouët, unfortunate Fos-

seuse (*Le Médecin de Campagne*), bold and unhappy Rosalie de Watteville (*Albert Savarus*), and the well-known Eugénie Grandet.

The novelist has revealed to us that he modeled one of these heroines on a combination of the woman who later became his wife, and her cousin, a most charming woman. It is quite possible that some if not all of the other heroines would be found to have equally interesting sources, could they be discovered.

Concerning the much discussed question as to whether Balzac portrayed young girls well, M. Marcel Barrière remarks:

> "There are critics stupid enough to say that Balzac knew nothing of the art of painting young girls; they make use of the inelegant, unpolished word *raté* to qualify his portraits of this *genre*. To be sure, Balzac's triumph is, we admit, in his portraits of mothers or passionate women who know life. Certain authors, without counting George Sand, have given us sketches of young girls far superior to Balzac's, but that is no reason for scoffing in so impertinent a manner at the author of the *Comédie humaine,* when his unquestionable glory ought to silence similar pamphletistic criticisms. We advise those who reproach Balzac for not having understood the simplicity, modesty and graces so full of charm, or often the artifice of the young girl, to please reread in the *Scènes de la Vie privée* the portraits of Louise de Chaulieu, Renée de Maucombe, Modeste Mignon, Julie de Chatillonest, Honorine de Beauvan, Mademoiselle Guillaume, Émilie de Fontaine, Mademoiselle Évangelista, Adélaïde du Rouvre, Ginevra di Piombo, etc., without mentioning, in the other *Scènes,* Eugénie Grandet,

Ève Séchard, Pierrette Lorrain, Ursule Mirouët, Mesdemoiselles Birotteau, Hulot d'Ervy, de Cinq-Cygne, La Fosseuse, Marguerite Claës, Juana de Mancini, Pauline Gaudin, and I hope they will keep silence, otherwise they will cause us to question their good sense of criticism." [4]

Balzac said it would require a Raphaël to create so many virgins; accordingly, from time to time the type of woman of the other extreme is also seen. She is portrayed in the *grande dame* and in the *courtisane,* that is, at the top and the bottom of the social ladder. On the one side are the Princesse de Cadignan, the Comtesse de Sériby, etc., while on the other are Esther Gobseck, Valérie Marneffe, and others. Some of the novelist's most striking antitheses were attained by placing these horrible creatures by the side of his noblest and purest creations.

In his *Avant-propos,* he criticized Walter Scott for having portrayed his women as Protestants, saying: "In Protestantism there is no possible future for the woman who has sinned; while, in the Catholic Church, the hope of forgiveness makes her sublime. Hence, for the Protestant writer there is but one woman, while the Catholic writer finds a new woman in each new situation." Naturally, most of the women of the *Comédie humaine* are Catholic, but among the exceptions is Madame Jeanrenaud (*L'Interdiction*), who is a Protestant; Josepha Mirah and Esther Gobseck are of Jewish origin. In portraying various women as Catholics, convent life for the young girl is seen in *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées,* and for the woman weary of society, in *La Duchesse de Langeais.* Extreme piety is shown in Madame de Granville (*Une*

[4] *L'Œuvre de Balzac,* p. 38.

*double Famille*), and Madame Graslin devoted herself to charity to atone for her crime.

Various pictures are given of woman in the home. Ideal happiness is portrayed in the life of Madame César Birotteau. Madame Grandet, Madame Hulot (*La Cousine Bette*), and Madame Claës (*La Recherche de l'Absolu*) were martyrs to their husbands, while Madame Sérizy made a martyr of hers. Beautiful motherhood is often seen, as in Madame Sauviat (*Le Curé de Village*), yet some of the mothers in Balzac are most heartless. A few professions among women are represented, actresses, artists, musicians and dancers being prominent in some of the stories.

It is quite possible and even probable that Balzac pictured many more women whom he knew in real life than have been mentioned here, and these may yet be traced. For obvious reasons, he avoided exact portraiture, yet in a few instances he indulged in it, notably in the sketch of George Sand as Mademoiselle des Touches. And lest one might not recognize the appearance of Madame Merlin as Madame Schontz (*Béatrix*), he boldly made her name public.

In presenting the women whom we know, the novelist was usually consistent. As has been seen, he regarded the home of Madame Carraud at Frapesle as a haven of rest, and went there like a wood-pigeon regaining its nest. The suffering Félix de Vandenesse (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*) could not, therefore, find calm until he went to the château de Frapesle to recuperate. The novelist could easily give this minute description of Frapesle with its towers, as well as the château de Saché, the home of M. de

Margonne, having spent so much of his time at both of these places.

The reader, having seen in the early pages of this book, Balzac's relation to his mother,— in case Félix de Vandenesse represents Balzac himself — is not surprised to learn that the mother of Félix was cold and tyrannical, indifferent to his happiness, that he had but little or no money to spend, that his brother was the favorite, that he was sent away to school early in life and remained there eight years, that his mother often reproached him and repressed his tenderness, and that to escape all contact with her he buried himself in reading.

Félix was in this unhappy state when he met Madame de Mortsauf, whose shoulders he kissed suddenly, and whose love for him later made him forget the miseries of childhood; in the same manner, Balzac made his first declaration to Madame de Berny. Madame de Mortsauf could easily be Madame de Berny with all her tenderness and sympathy, or she could be Madame Hanska. The intense maternal love of the heroine could represent either, but especially the later. M. de Mortsauf could be either M. de Berny or M. de Hanski. Balzac left Madame de Berny and became enraptured with Madame de Castries, and had had a similar infatuation for Madame d'Abrantès, just as Félix made Madame de Mortsauf jealous by his devotion to Lady Arabelle Dudley. It will be remembered that Madame Hanska was suspicious of Balzac's relations with an English lady, Countess Visconti, although the novelist states that he had written this work before he knew Madame Visconti. The novelist has doubtless combined traits of various women in a single character, but

the fact still remains that he was depicting life as he knew it, even if he did not attempt exact portraiture.

While the famous Vicomtesse de Beauséant (*La Femme abandonnée*) has many characteristics of the Duchesse d'Abrantès, and some of those of the Duchesse de Castries, she has also some of those of Madame de Berny, and *La Femme abandonnée* was written the year Balzac severed his relations with his *Dilecta.* But it is especially in the gentleness and patience portrayed in Madame Firmiami, in the affection and self-sacrifice of Pauline de Villenoix for Louis Lambert, and the devotion of Pauline Gaudin to Raphaël in *La Peau de Chagrin* that Madame de Berny is most strikingly represented. She was all this and more to Balzac. Furthermore, he may have obtained from her his historical color for *Un Episode sous la Terreur,* just as he was influenced by Madame Junot in writing stories of the Empire and Corsican vengeance.

It was perhaps to avoid recognition of the heroine and to revenge himself on Madame de Castries that he made the Duchesse de Langeais enter a convent and die, after her failure to master the Marquis de Montriveau, while for his part the hero soon forgot her.

Soon after introducing Madame de Mortsauf (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*), Balzac compares her to the fragant heather gathered on returning from the Villa Diodati. After studying carefully his long period of association with Madame Hanska, one can see the importance which the Villa Diodati had in his life. This is only another incident, small though it be, showing how this woman impressed herself so deeply on the novelist that almost un-

consciously he brought memories of his *Prédilecta* into his work. It has been shown that she served as a model for some of his most attractive heroines; was honored, under different names, with the dedication of three works, besides the one dedicated to her daughter; and was the originator of one of his most popular novels for young girls, while many traces of herself and her family connections are found throughout the whole *Comédie humaine.*

Though by far the most important of them all, she was only one of the many *étrangères* he knew. As has been observed, he knew women of Russia, Poland, Germany, Austria, England, Italy and Spain, and had traveled in most of these countries; hence one is not surprised at the large number of foreign women who have appeared in his work. Among the most noted of these are Lady Brandon (*La Grenadière*); Lady Dudley (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*); Madame Varèse (*Massimilla Doni*); la Duchesse de Rhétoré (*Albert Savarus*), who was in reality Madame Hanska, although presented as being Italian; Madame Claës (*La Recherche de l'Absolu*), of Spanish origin though born in Brussels; Paquita Valdès (*La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*); and the Corsican Madame Luigi Porta (*La Vendetta*).

In regard to Balzac's various women friends, J. W. Sherer has very appropriately observed: "And the man was worthy of them: the student of his work knows what a head he had; the student of his life, what a heart." [5]

[5] *The Female Friends of Balzac, The Gentleman's Magazine,* v. 266, p. 125; 1889.

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# ERRATA

Page vi. Change *prés-ider* to *pré-sider*, *redev-able* to *rede-vable* and *assur-ance* to *assu-rance*.
Pages 6, 60, 320. Change *Tourangin* to *Touranger*.
Page 38. Change *Le Jeunesse* to *La Jeunesse*.
Pages 51, 279. Change *Laur-ence* to *Lau-rence*.
Page 68. Change *Fortunêe* to *Fortunée*.
Page 78. Change *écoliére* to *écolière*.
Page 96. Change *Jos-eph* to *Jo-seph*.
Page 97. Change *Madam de Berny* to *Madame de Berny*.
Page 99, line 22. Change *is* to *are*.
Page 104. Change *Mar-iage* to *Ma-riage*.
Page 119. Change *epiderme* to *épiderme*.
Page 123. Change *independente* to *indépendante*.
Page 133. Change *Princess de Lieven* to *Princesse de Lieven*.
Page 135. Change *Clementine* to *Clémentine*.
Page 174. Change *Campam* to *Campan*.
Page 199. Change *l'Étrangérè* to *l'Étrangère*.
Page 203. Change *Shikoff* to *Shirkoff*.
Page 207. Change *Sév-érine* to *Séve-rine*.
Page 225. Change *medis-imo* to *mede-simo*.
Page 226. Change *Mar-échal* to *Maré-chal*.
Page 238. Change *Étrang-ère* to *Étran-gère*.
Pages 247, 279. Change *Zéphir-ine* to *Zéphi-rine*.
Page 266, line 5. Omit comma after *about*.
Page 273. Change *Lubom-irska* to *Lubo-mirska*.
Page 274. Change *Mig-non* to *Mi-gnon*.
Page 281. Change *Ros-alie* to *Ro-salie* and *Évangel-ista* to *Évange-lista*.
Page 282. Change *Sér-iby* to *Séri-zy*.
Page 284, line 3. Omit comma after *book*.
line 21. Change *later to latter*.
Page 292. Change *Al-exandre* to *A-lexandre*.
Page 295. Change *Marguer-ite* to *Margue-rite*.
Page 296 Change *Pèler-inage* to *Pèle-rinages*.
Page 300. Omit the word *Catherine* after the first *Princesse Radziwill*.
Page 302. Change *Ondine* to *Undine*.
Page 304. Change *Frances* to *France* and *Wordet* to *Werdet*.
Page 311. Change *Cöusine Bette* to *Cousine Bette*.
Page 313. Change *Firmiami* to *Firmiani*.
Page 314. Change *Guillonnet-Marville* to *Guillonnet-Merville*.
Page 317. Change *Péche veniel* to *Péché véniel*.
Page 319. Change *d'-Agoult* to *d'A-goult*.